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Research Cover Sheet

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Craig Storti's *The Art of Crossing Cultures* offers a useful perspective on cultural awareness for people who intend to work or live abroad. An accomplished author and a former Peace Corps volunteer, Storti packages his personal experiences in order to glean a refreshing perspective on life among people who are culturally different. The author presents the material in a palpable way appealing to diplomats, business executives, and even tourists. The concepts throughout the book are particularly germane for military personnel serving abroad, especially for those whose success depends on positive interactions with the local populace. Storti provides an opportunity to understand ourselves better—regardless of organizational affiliation—in order to adapt to the challenges of living and working overseas. Through my extensive travel experience working for the Department of State, I can personally attest to the importance of honing these critical skills to facilitate productive and enjoyable experiences abroad. From front to back, *The Art of Crossing Cultures* is as enjoyable to read as it is a critical tool for any expatriate who wants to be a more prepared, more successful, and more comfortable stepping into an entirely new world to negotiate cultural challenges.

Having served in the Peace Corps, Storti provides clarity and insight to the challenges that may affect success abroad. Much like missionaries, diplomats, or business executives, success for Peace Corps volunteers depends on their ability to work closely with the local population. Peace Corps volunteers must absorb local nuances and understand cultural protocols in order to relate to the community they serve. Sensitivity to cultural norms and self-awareness are both characteristics of people who successfully integrate into a new culture. Equally important is the willingness to adapt to local circumstances by looking through the collective lens of the local population. To reduce the effects of cultural biases, it is essential to frame problems in the same manner as the locals do. Storti's firsthand experience, along with his

numerous books and workshops on travel and cultural issues, lends credibility to this book due to his personal witness of cultural interactions.

No doubt as a Peace Corps volunteer Storti was in a position to see, or at least hear about, seasoned diplomats failing to assimilate. Unfortunately, it is common for diplomats to serve a tour abroad and only leave the diplomatic enclave as necessary for a meeting, reception, or project. Granted, many diplomats may be exceptional at reporting; however, some of these officers could increase their diplomatic value if they took an interest in studying and emulating the cultural norms of their interlocutors. Storti discusses this later in his book when he examines the natural tendency for many expats to reside in the "foreign colony,...wherein they have achieved the rather dubious distinction of living abroad without ever leaving home." Personnel from the Peace Corps, and even certain non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and faith-based organizations, often do not have the luxury of retreating to a foreign colony. As such, one might argue such individuals are more adept at the art of crossing cultures, if nothing other than out of sheer necessity due to the nature, location, and duration of their mission. In any case, it is reasonable to expect that the majority of travelers will encounter some level of difficulty mitigating clash of culture issues. For such individuals, Storti's book offers excellent guidance.

For first time travelers or for readers who have extensive travel experience, this book offers important tools for success. The overall organization of the book is logical, and the chapters flow in an organized and intuitive fashion. The chapters can stand alone for ease of use as reference material for a traveler who may be struggling with a particular topic. Readers with travel experience will find themselves nodding in agreement with many of the problems discussed throughout the book and can find solace in Storti's ideas and recommendations. Early on, Storti talks about the things that most travelers will want to know about; issues associated

with a change in climate, doing without conveniences, new work and family routines, hardships in certain parts of the world, and adjusting to a new community. Storti says, "It's not the nature of these adjustments that makes them so daunting, but the sheer number and variety."

Not only does Storti present a familiar context to equip the reader with great information that is fodder for consideration before a move, he offers practical insight to deal with the associated stresses and challenges. The numerous factors and logistic problems that are involved in moving to a foreign country can be stressful for seasoned military personnel, let alone for a first time traveler. It is natural to expect that these stresses will affect one's ability to deal with local culture upon arrival. Storti correctly points out that these stresses will be "competing for your attention and energy." Getting ahead of the curve and managing the transition process will enable the traveler to deal effectively with the culture when the time comes. He also points out the consequences if the traveler ignores the stress management component, such as illness and mission failure. Being fully prepared for the challenges associated with moving to a new country will better position the traveler to adjust to the culture after arrival. After all, "Getting used to curry isn't the same as getting used to the people who eat curry." Storti understands that both are important, and he wisely took the time to differentiate pre-departure and arrival challenges from cultural challenges, thereby allowing for a dedicated analysis on the cultural aspect of travel.

Early in the book, Storti excitedly prepares the reader through an overview of the benefits associated with increasing one's "art of crossing cultures." Awareness and experience of local culture is a powerful tool for military personnel, executives, and diplomats. For the negotiator, a basic awareness of cultural nuances can increase the trust and rapport between interlocutors, thereby increasing the probability for favorable outcomes. Storti highlights the importance cultural awareness plays in preventing "irreparable harm" during the course of conducting

interactions abroad. Storti sets the stage for the rest of the book by pointing out that regardless of the organizational affiliation, travelers will inevitably need to interact with the local populace even if only at the most basic level. He acknowledges that people can easily interact with people, but to do so successfully requires an intentional approach that may not come naturally. One must exercise due diligence when preparing to travel and there are several things that should be done prior to departure such as acquiring more information.

Citing a survey from Windham International, Storti points out that the inability to adapt to local cultures is a major reason for assignment failure. This data should resonate with organizations that send personnel abroad. Failure to prepare employees for an assignment could lead to mission failure, increased costs, morale problems, and a tarnished reputation for the sending entity. It can also cause irreparable damage to the local population. According to Storti, high turnover among senior expats, who are often powerful decision and policy makers, can have many unintended consequences for those who interact and work for them. As such, it would be prudent for training programs to include lessons on area studies and culture. In the military context, one may think of stabilization operations in places such as Afghanistan where there is considerable face-to-face interaction, the results of which touch on life safety issues and can carry national security implications. Whether deploying to a war zone or a less critical mission, Storti's book should be mandatory reading for personnel assigned to work in foreign cultures.

Individual success depends on successful encounters with local interlocutors. Storti explains that cultural "incidents" occur when "one or more of the parties is confused, offended, frustrated, or otherwise put off by the behavior of any of the other parties." If an unintended cultural mistake causes communication to stop between parties, then a negotiation can fail before it starts. Storti softens his stance when he says that no single incident will result in failure. In

reality, business, diplomatic, and military negotiations can fail due to a single cultural incident. For example, a violation of protocol stemming from a lack of cultural knowledge ultimately derailed a deal between General Electric and Mitsubishi in the early '90s. However, Storti contends that most setbacks can be repaired, but often at a high cost and with considerable energy spent on reestablishing lost trust. Setbacks will be minimized as long as parties are equipped with enough cultural information to allow negotiations and interactions to take place free of fatal cultural incidents. By failing to plan and adequately prepare to operate and negotiate in a foreign culture, a negotiator is ignoring the importance of information and power in negotiations. Although not spelled out, this is the underlying theme throughout Storti's book and it translates perfectly for travelers of all types.

Storti presents solutions to cultural problems by analyzing "Type I" and "Type II" incidents. A Type I incident is the reaction of an expat to the perceived negative behavior of people from the local population. A Type II incident is the reaction of a person from the local population to the perceived negative behavior of an expat. Storti offers examples of both Type I and Type II situations to provide clarity and context to the reader, and in doing so accomplishes two things. First, he warns the reader that while things may seem to be going well for one party, the other party may take issue with perceived offending behavior. Second, Storti explains that mistakes will invariably happen and these mistakes will naturally lead to frustration. The unintended consequences resulting from Type I and Type II incidents can be significant.

Storti illustrates the impact of unintended consequences stemming from cultural incidents in a clever case study of an executive who had trouble adapting to life in Cairo. The first viewpoint of the story is from that of the executive. Storti shows how the executive's frustrations dealing with people during the course of an average day resulted in such a negative attitude that

success was next to impossible. The lesson highlights how important it is to maintain a healthy perspective in order to manage frustrations. The executive allowed his poor attitude to corrupt subsequent interactions with those he came into contact with. The second viewpoint is from his Egyptian interlocutors. The Egyptians took exception with the executive's unintended rude behavior. They were left shaking their heads in dismay and simply did not know how to effectively work with the executive. The take away from this case study suggests that it is prudent for any organization or individual to take every measure to reduce the quantity and severity of cultural incidents due to the real possibility of mission degradation. If a key local contact is offended by some behavior, it is quite possible that the offending party will have no viable recourse should the services of this contact be required in the future. More often than not, expats do not have power over local contacts and must rely on trust and friendship to facilitate task accomplishment.

Shown from two opposing viewpoints, the lesson from this case study illustrates how cultural understanding can make a substantial difference in personal-level negotiations. Using a common theme, Storti effectively demonstrates how perceptions of situations can vary based on the cultural lens from which they are viewed. Whether negotiating the price of a souvenir, an important business deal, or security arrangements between the U.S. military and a village chief, there are tangible benefits in avoiding cultural incidents. The take away from this case study for the military audience is the use of knowledge as power. Understanding cultural differences can be a powerful tool for relationship building and cultural knowledge can provide the means to develop trust that will help U.S. military personnel in routine interactions abroad.

Storti moves on to discuss how some expats gradually turn against the local culture. According to Storti, there are two negative reactions to culturally related frustrations. The first

reaction is for the expat to try and change the local culture to suit his/her needs. This usually leads to failure because the expat is trying to fix something he/she does not fully understand. This failure breeds only more negativity and frustration.

The second reaction is for the expat to start avoiding people. An entire chapter is dedicated to the dangers associated with the avoidance of the local population. While evading is a technique on the Negotiating Preferences and Styles Chart (NPSC), it is not recommended when dealing with clash of culture issues. Storti asserts that avoidance often leads to more frustration, and ultimately, mission failure—something the U.S. military wants to avoid. Storti reiterates the importance of keeping cultural incidents from happening so resulting reactions do not jeopardize goals and objectives.

In order to address cultural challenges, Storti recognizes the importance of first identifying the underlying cause for conflict. He uses the term "cultural conditioning" to explain how groups pass on behaviors and values to subsequent groups in order to successfully exist in a given culture. The result of cultural conditioning is the natural and unconscious instinct that everyone is more or less like us because that is how we grew up—surrounded by individuals bound together by common culture. The common culture allows norms to develop that enable people to feel comfortable and function normally. When a cultural interaction takes place and something "abnormal" develops, a common perception is that something "wrong" took place. When something may appear abnormal, it does not mean it is wrong; but a lifetime of cultural conditioning is not easy to overcome. However, realizing that problems stem from one's unmet expectations, as opposed to the behavior of the locals, is a good starting point for any traveler wanting to increase their personal situational awareness.

Storti addresses how to solve the problem of cultural incidents by refraining from the common assumption that other cultures are the same as our own. Storti focuses on managing our own expectations instead of focusing on the behaviors of the native people. Although this may sound simple, Storti contends that our deep cultural conditioning will make this a challenge. It is useful to hone the ability to recognize reactions from both sides through constant situational awareness during interactions with the indigenous population. Over time, practice will allow a traveler to modify behavior in real time as the interaction is taking place. The ability to manage behavior and reactions, combined with embracing the local culture through acquiring sufficient information on local behavior, are key ingredients to success. Storti suggests increasing information through "observation, conversation, and study." This is something that military personnel should be encouraged to do. All organizations should espouse this low cost and high return individual level investment.

To this end, an intentional effort to learn and interact with the local population will enable travelers to have a better chance for favorable outcomes on negotiations and other interactions abroad. Cultural training, patience, and a willingness to engage are necessary for mission success in a foreign country. Greater cultural knowledge will lead to fewer cultural incidents and travelers will be less inclined to adopt the tactic of avoidance, which can be tantamount to mission failure. Storti provides a roadmap that sets the stage for mission success by increasing cultural knowledge and learning to conform, in a legal and moral manner, to local norms. As an added touch, Storti mentions learning some of the language as an additional enabler to help reduce country shock and to build additional "trust" with locals. Knowing even a little language serves as a symbolic gesture that carries considerable weight in most countries. Language skills also pave the way to a deeper understanding of communications and culture.

Lastly, even rudimentary language skills can help a negotiator ensure the other side is staying honest should they be prone to taking advantage of language deficiency.

For an organization involved in matters of national security or decisions that carry life and death implications, there is a fiduciary responsibility to arm every individual sent into a foreign environment with an understanding of the local culture and the requisite tools for dealing with common clash of culture problems discussed in Storti's book. Not only will such personnel serve as better ambassadors, but they will also have a greater chance of performing their duties in a manner expected of the sending organization. Each encounter with the local populace will net better results when personnel understand the importance of recognizing and avoiding cultural incidents. Because the possibility of mission failure increases with the number of cultural incidents, missions that require interaction with the local populace should include cultural interaction training. To ignore the importance of understanding the people part of the equation is unnecessarily setting the stage for failure. In some cases, for an individual or an organization, one incident can be too many.

Storti offers straightforward advice and techniques that military members can apply in order to reduce the stress associated with traveling abroad. This will increase the probability of having positive cultural experiences and in turn will lead to a greater likelihood of successful mission accomplishment. For personnel who work and live on base, even periodic positive interactions with the local population will serve as a force multiplier by propping up unit morale. For individuals who have regular interaction with foreign personnel, such as air advisors, it is essential to understand the local culture in order to work effectively with local counterparts. In the military context, personnel of all ranks in various capacities serving abroad should gain the cultural awareness skill set for all the reasons discussed in this analysis.

The lessons from Storti's book are timeless and apply to a broad range of readers. For travelers of all types, there is everything to gain by developing a keener sense of the local culture. Storti thoroughly demonstrates the positive correlation between mission success and enhanced cultural understanding. If mission failure is not an option for an individual or organization, then cultural preparation should be an integral planning component. *The Art of Crossing Cultures* will appeal to all travelers, especially those with an eye on efficiently accomplishing missions abroad.

Shawn H. Sherlock is a Supervisory Special Agent with the US Department of State. His 18 years of government service include four years in the US Marine Corps. His assignments include tours in Japan, Greece, Malta, Cameroon, Belarus, and Cyprus. From 2004-2008 he traveled to over 20 countries throughout the Middle East, Europe, and Africa while serving in Diplomatic Security's Office of International Programs and the Antiterrorism Assistance Office. Upon completion of studies at the Air Command and Staff College class of 2012, he will serve two years at the US Embassy in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.