

## Chapter 40

# Cultural Adaptation of E-Learning Courseware: An Ethics and Compliance Example

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### ABSTRACT

*Web-based and self-paced learning modules have become a common-and sometimes primary-tool used by the Ethics & Compliance departments of global organizations to educate employees worldwide. These e-learning modules provide guidance around such topics as the company's Code of Conduct, specific policies or laws, globally applicable corporate standards, and how best to manage ethical dilemmas in a corporate environment. In this case, the authors describe the instructional design process that were used on various ethics and compliance courses to achieve a more global, regional, or country-specific applicability, including an overview of changes made to content and methodology that was originally perceived as "very American."*

### ORGANIZATION OR SITUATION BACKGROUND

#### Language and Culture Worldwide

Language and Culture Worldwide (LCW) offers training, translation, and consulting services for global organizations. LCW's training contextualization services evaluate and adapt learning tools and strategies so that they are more successful with multicultural and multilingual audiences (Language and Culture Worldwide, 2010).

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#### eWorld Learning, Inc.

eWorld Learning, Inc. analyzes and revises training courses, particularly self-paced elearning courses, to align the content, instructional methods, and media/technology to the preferences of learners in other countries and cultures. eWorld Learning recommends critical modifications (those that could interfere with learning or learner acceptance) and tests those modifications with the targeted learners. Subsequently, we revise courses *before* they are translated, localized (from a technical and language perspective), or reproduced (eWorld Learning Inc., 2010).

## Background

Web-based and self-paced learning modules have become a common -- and sometimes primary -- tool used by the Ethics & Compliance departments of global organizations to educate employees worldwide. However, as these courses are used more frequently outside of the United States, non-American learners protest that the courses are not acceptable or relevant to them, recognizing that many aspects reflect American culture, not theirs. Thus, e-learning designers must understand, anticipate, and adapt to cultural differences *before* courses are 'exported' to different cultures. In addition, ethics and compliance content must be accurate for the non-US regions or countries and placed in a context that is meaningful to them.

Typically, software being marketed to other countries is translated and localized before it is reproduced for international markets. Translation addresses specific dialects. Localization addresses obvious cultural differences, such as; spelling changes (localize to 'localise,' for example); replacing images and icons for local versions (replacing an American stop sign for a European one); and technical aspects (ensuring that the software supports expanded text, other alphabets, and so forth). However, elearning courseware, while it is technically software, is also a cultural artifact, imbedded with the cultural values, preferences, and nuances of the designing culture. Thus, for elearning courseware to be most effective for multinational and multicultural audiences, *cultural adaptation* beyond translation and localization becomes critical.

Cultural analysis of courseware is the foundation of cultural adaptation. Courses are analyzed to determine what needs to be changed, why and how, to best reflect the environment and learning preferences of the targeted learners. We analyze existing content (language, relevance, and context), pedagogy (instructional methods, activities, and assessments), and media/technology (acceptability, images and scenes, audio, etc.), so they

align with regional and national expectations and cultural preferences.

The cultural analysis allows us to identify the characteristics that make the course 'too American' and subsequently, to at least neutralize or replace them with local or regional variations, depending upon where the courseware is to be launched. For example, a video scene in the American version of a module on Conflict of Interest portrayed casually dressed participants sipping coffee from Styrofoam cups outside of a hotel conference room. For the European version of the module, we replaced the scene with well-dressed participants sipping coffee from glass cups in a sophisticated hotel lobby with silver coffee urns (see Figure 1). This is an example of image localization, an integral part of cultural adaptation. However, in some instances, as you will see, we also make modifications to how the course is taught in order to accommodate learner preferences. Our goal is to remove or modify any course elements that could alienate learners, interfere with effective learning, or simply be incorrect or inaccurate in a different locale.

## SETTING THE STAGE

While some organizations design their own classroom and web-based ethics and compliance learning, there are also numerous ethics and

Figure 1. US coffee break vs. European



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