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## Escargot, Burgers and Sushi: Differing Palates and Change Approaches to Consider in Asia-Pac, Europe, and the U.S.

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# Introduction

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Venturing into a change management initiative in Asia or Europe is a formidable challenge for almost any company. Imagine having to do that in Asia and Europe plus one in the U.S.? This paper will discuss a change management/training project case study about two large global telecommunications companies that merged to create one global subsidiary. The merger included a rollout of a new time and expense entry system to over 6,300 employees in various cities in the U.S., Europe and Asia-Pacific countries.

The objectives of this paper are to:

- ❑ Discuss the merger history of the two global telecommunication companies.
- ❑ Discuss the project objectives of rolling out training to over 6,300 employees.
- ❑ Discuss the differing change management approaches to each of the differing cultures.
- ❑ Discuss the challenges to overcome and the resolution to these challenges.
- ❑ Discuss lessons learned from the rollout for future training sessions in the differing countries.

# Historical Background

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## JOINT VENTURE

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In June 1993, British Telecommunications (BT) and MCI Communications Corporation (MCI) announced a joint venture called Concert. Concert was created “to provide global services to business customers”<sup>1</sup> on a global scale to deliver end-to-end connectivity to multinational corporations. Portugal Telecom became a partner with MCI and BT in 1997.<sup>2</sup>

When a merger of WorldCom and MCI was in the making, it affected the joint venture and broke the relationship between MCI and BT. Thus in 1999, a joint venture was made between BT and AT&T. The headquarters for Concert was in Reston, VA with multi-national offices in U.S., Europe and Asia-Pacific consisting of over 6,300 employees.

# Project Description

Starting in 1999, Concert was implementing various applications including Oracle Applications Release 11 and their own in-house self-developed web applications (WebApps). Oracle Applications were only utilized in their headquarters in Reston, VA. But WebApps were going to be rolled out to the rest of the Concert offices throughout the world.

The WebApps included:

- ❑ Time Entry
- ❑ Travel Expenses
- ❑ Purchase Orders
- ❑ Receivables
- ❑ Contractor Set Up

Concert wanted to roll out training for the Time Entry and Travel components for all 6,300 employees. It was going to be facilitated on-site, at the multiple locations, just-in-time, before the WebApps went live. The training consisted of both the business process and the WebApps navigation.

# Challenges and Approach

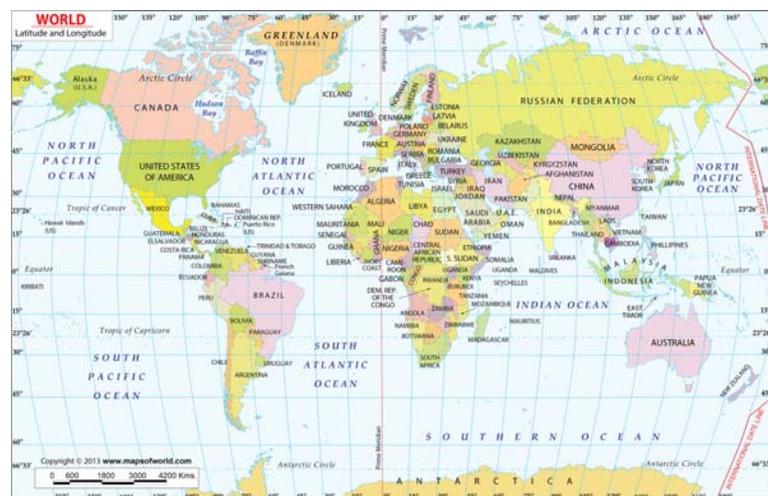


Figure 1

## CHALLENGES

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### Training Rollout

Training was to be completed within the month of May 2000. It was going to be rolled out to over 6,300 employees in several cities in the U.S., in England, France, Australia, Singapore, Hong Kong and Tokyo. This was going to be a daunting task. How can Concert roll out this training to over 6,300 employees, just-in-time, in multiple locations throughout the world? <sup>Figure 1.</sup>

### Different Cultures

The training team had to deal with the different cultures. Not only did the teams have to prepare for the different ethnic cultures, the teams had to prepare for the different company cultures. Remember, the joint venture took existing employees from both AT&T and BT. How could the teams tailor the same message and training to the different cultures while using the same training materials?

### Preparation

The training team consisted of two different consulting companies. Neither company was involved in the early stages of the WebApps development nor did they develop the training materials and delivery method. These were two different consulting companies that have never worked with each other before and were placed together a month prior to the rollout. Teams were formed (4 – 2 from each consulting company) and they learned their roles.

Logistically, the teams also had to deal with travel and hotel arrangements in the different locations throughout the world AND learn all the different cultures.

### Change Management

At this time, the Change Management methodology was not a streamlined process. Although the basis of the methodology and principles were being established in the 1980s with the likes of Linda Ackerman and Dean Anderson who authored “Beyond Change Management” and the Big 6 Management Consulting Firms, it was not standard practice.

There were theorists, such as John M. Fisher and John Kotter who wrote numerous books and created change models that consulting firms have adopted today and have evolved and integrated in software application implementation methodologies. But again, it was not standard practice back in the late 1990s.

To understand how change management works, one needs to understand the major tenet, “Change Management is the application of a structured process and tools to enable individuals or groups to transition from a current state to a future state, such that a desired outcome is achieved.” (Prosci) The components that are important in this definition are “process and tools”, “individuals or groups”, “current state to future state” and finally the “desired outcome”.

Another hurdle to overcome was user buy-in. How did Concert handle this prior to the roll-out? Concert had sponsorship from their leaders on this initiative. There was a communication sent to all employees stating the WebApps were going to be implemented and that they would receive training right before go-live. Concert created an intranet site called In-Concert, which contained all the necessary links to all of the WebApps and also included any communication, forms, etc. associated with Concert, its applications and business processes.

## **APPROACH**

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### **Roll Out**

The “Process and Tools” for this training was the in-house application itself, the training guides/reference material, the training facilities, help desk, the soon to be subject matter experts (SMEs) and the training teams. The first 30 minutes of training covered the new business process of time entry and travel/expense submission and the last 30 minutes covered the navigation training.

The “Individuals or Groups” were the audiences of the training classes. It was decided that a few individuals from the different offices and departments were chosen to be trained and then those new SMEs would train their departments when they returned by the go-live date.

The “Current State to the Future State” consisted of moving past the different types of Time Entry/Expense Entry applications being used by these different offices from AT&T and BT and unifying this joint venture to utilizing one platform, the WebApps. And last but not least, the “Desired Outcome” was to roll-out the training, just-in-time, by go-live so that all 6,300 employees worldwide would use it successfully.

### **Preparation**

The teams met a month prior to the training roll out. Teams were created from the two different consulting firms. The teams were trained on the WebApps and on the new business processes. There were four teams created for the U.S., one team

for the Europe and one team for Asia-Pacific.

The teams also had to arrange their own travel and hotel reservations. They worked with the various Concert representatives in the host countries to assist them on the hotel accommodations. The training materials were provided by Concert and were ready for each of the teams when they arrived at the training locations. Separately and informally, the teams that traveled internationally prepared themselves for the cultural diversity that they would encounter. This will be discussed further in “Dealing with the Different Cultures” section below.

## **Change Management**

All of the change management process except the training facilitation was handled by Concert. They rolled out the communication plan which consisted of emails and their intranet “In-Concert.” They had strong sponsorship from the executives and steering committee which was relayed in their communication plan. An assessment questionnaire was created to assess the training effectiveness and was given to the students at the end of each session.

## **Dealing with the Different Cultures**

The teams had to deal with the different company cultures of both AT&T and BT. The audience was already part of the BT team, so the company culture was a non-issue. The international delivery team had to also deal with the different cultures.

The Asia-Pacific team had to deliver training in Australia (Sydney, Melbourne), Singapore, Hong Kong and Tokyo. This team had the daunting task to tailor their delivery to several different cultures. In preparation, one of the team members did research for all the locations they were visiting. There were employees that were from Australia, Philippines, China (Taiwan, Hong Kong), Japan, India and British nationals who were part of the audience.

Simple approaches—such as personal space, introductions, attendance, local colloquial language, etiquette—were important to study. Table 1 below contains some examples of business etiquette that the team had to keep in mind.<sup>3,4</sup>

Business etiquette was essential to learn before venturing to these different countries. Although the training material stayed the same and was written in English, the interaction with the audience had to be tailored to accommodate and be respectful to their diverse customs, business etiquette, dining etiquette, etc. Many of these countries differed in their seniority and titles. Nonverbal communication was also considered.

Many of the audience members were mixed. Not all of the audience members came from the same country. So, there were

times the team had to train Australians, Malays, Chinese, Taiwanese, Japanese, Indians and British nationals. So not only did the teams have to tailor their approach for each session, they had to tailor their approach to the individuals in the audience.

No formal training was involved. The research was done on an individual basis using references such as the Culture Shock books, the internet and personal/professional experience abroad. This information was shared amongst the team.

**Table 1**

	Australia	Singapore	Hong Kong	Japan
<b>Language</b>	English	English, Chinese, Malay, Indian	English, Chinese (Cantonese and Mandarin)	Japanese, English
<b>Greeting/ Introductions</b>	Shake hands when meeting and when leaving	Depending on the nationality, introductions may be formal, based on seniority, bowing, shaking hands, not shaking hands with women in public, nodding head and smiling.	Hand shake is commonly used when greeting Westerners. Handshake is rather light. Hong Kong Chinese lower their eyes as a sign of respect.	Greetings are very formal and ritualized. Wait to be introduced. While foreigners are expected to shake hands, the traditional form of greeting is the bow. The deeper the bow, the more respect you show.
<b>Business Cards</b>	Exchanging at the initial introduction without formal ritual.	Exchanged after initial introductions. Exchanged using both hands. Hand card so the typeface faces the recipient. Business cards should be in pristine condition.	Exchanged after initial introductions. Exchanged using both hands. Hand card so the typeface faces the recipient. Business cards should be in pristine condition.	Exchange is done with great ceremony. Hand card so the typeface faces the recipient. Business cards should be in pristine condition. Place business cards on the table in front of you in the order people are seated.
<b>Friendliness</b>	Friendly and open, but directness and brevity are valued	Friendly, but respectful. Rank is respected.	Friendly, but respectful. Rank is respected.	Formal, non-confrontational
<b>Attendance</b>	Punctuality is critical.	Punctuality is a virtue.	Arrive on time, if detained, call and advice the person you are meeting.	Punctuality is critical.

	Australia	Singapore	Hong Kong	Japan
<b>Communication</b>	Maintain good eye contact.	Nonverbal communication is important; watch your body language and facial expressions.	Direct communication, although they may also use non-verbal communication.	Often remain silent for long periods of time. Be patient. Soft spoken.
<b>Gift Giving</b>	Not common practice in business.	Depends on nationality.	Gift may be refused one or two times before accepted.	Gift giving is highly ritualistic and meaningful.
<b>Rules</b>	Do not litter.	Follow strict laws, i.e. gum chewing, etc.		Watch your table manners.
<b>Business Attire</b>	Conservative (Sydney, Melbourne); casual other places	Conservative	Conservative	Conservative

## Outcome and Lessons Learned

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### OUTCOME

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The global WebApps training roll-out was effective and successful. The SMEs were trained and all training was completed within the 30 day timeline. Reference material and help desk information was helpful. Ongoing training to smaller groups involved other WebApps including; Purchase Orders, Receivables and Contractor Submission in the months that followed and used the same reference material and help desk information.

The various training teams delivered the training at the different locations throughout the world with few technical issues.

### LESSONS LEARNED

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The training roll-out of Concert's WebApps was a success. The training was delivered to all of the different locations throughout the world, but there were still lessons learned:

- ❑ The training team should have been involved in the early stages of the change management and training development.

- ❑ It probably would have been more cost-effective to have two trainers instead of four on each team from one consulting company versus two consulting companies. There were internal team communication gaps.
- ❑ A more streamlined onboarding, training ramp up should have been created for the teams.
- ❑ There should have been a more formal cultural training. There was none provided. The teams were left to research and share the information on their own. Still, there were team members that did not respect the cultural differences and created some delivery/etiquette issues. These were resolved quickly when discovered.
- ❑ Travel plans should have been better prepared for the worse case scenarios. The flight from Chicago to San Francisco was delayed and almost caused the team to miss the connecting flight to Australia. If the team missed that connecting flight, the team would have arrived a day late for training.

## CONCLUSION

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It was a challenging but very rewarding project. Many of the team members spent almost a month away from their home location because of the training roll-out delivery timeline. There should have been more preparation for the international teams but in the end, the training was delivered on time and was successful. The culturally diverse audience kept the training sessions interesting, enriched the team's multi-cultural knowledge and sensitivity, and the team learned how to adapt quickly to any situation/individual that occurred. All in all, Concert's employees received the training required, on-time with no outstanding issues.

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