

Andrés T. Tapia



The Obama Era
and the Transformation
of Global Diversity

THE INCLUSION PARADOX:
The Obama Era and the Transformation of Global Diversity

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Chapter 4

I Need Your Differences ... And You Need Mine

How could I have missed it? I really thought I had agreement from the group. After all, one of the team members had even said, “Andrés, I agree with you 100 percent.” Yet when I started acting on the agreement I was sure we had, the e-mails and voicemails started flying in: “What are you doing? This is something we did not agree to!” Confused, I replied, “What part of 100 percent didn’t I understand?”

As a Latino in corporate America, I once again had broken some unspoken rule, missed some commonly understood signal, and a foul was called. I was yellow carded. But unlike on the soccer field where I know why, on the corporate field I had no idea. Making things even more difficult: My colleagues weren’t even aware I did not know what had gone amiss.

What had gone amiss — I was to learn through much trial, error, and observation of the Midwestern, European-American corporate culture — was that I was a middle-class Latin American guy with a direct style of communication inside an indirect-communication-style corporate environment. What I had missed were the body language and code words signaling disagreement that people with similar cultural backgrounds would intuitively interpret, but were lost on me.

I had my own body language and code words that other Latin Americans would interpret correctly, but that my European-American colleagues had missed and misinterpreted on their end.

And so it went. They thought I was confrontational. I thought they were duplicitous. They thought I was disruptive. I thought they were inefficient.

Every minute, somewhere in the corporate world, someone who is different from the mainstream, someone whom the corporation wanted in their midst because diversity is a business imperative, is not feeling included. We're making missteps that lead to the raised eyebrows, the sidelong glances, the "tsk, tsk" of "doesn't she have a clue?"

We must not only acknowledge we're different from one another in vital ways, but we must be able to skillfully navigate these differences to succeed together. This is a must-have skill in the Obama Era. Whether in government, academia, nonprofits, or the corporate world, never before have we seen such an intersection of powerful, competent, and ambitious talent working together on behalf of common organizational missions — but with wildly differing ways of going about it. The requisite bundle of skills and behaviors is what's referred to as *crosscultural competence*, and it's something that must be exhibited by both individuals and organizations.

What exactly do I mean by "crosscultural competence?" As I shared earlier, it's "the ability to discern and take into account one's own and others' worldviews, to be able to solve problems, make decisions, and resolve conflicts in ways that optimize cultural differences for better, longer lasting, and more creative solutions."

How can companies bulk up talent and organizations in this competence? Not surprisingly, most initial answers will veer toward the need for training. In these transformational times, however, pinpoint solutions will not be enough. Building crosscultural competence is a developmental task similar to building great managers and leaders. One classroom or online learning experience won't do the trick. It requires a systemic approach that changes underlying assumptions about managing differences, how we assess and reward people, the kind of talent we hire, the structures and processes we put in place to get things done, and yes, the learning we provide employees. Even the learning must be staged out with the realism and respect this competence demands, however. In the same way that most of us would not be able to handle algebra without first learning basic arithmetic, so it is with learning how to navigate our differences in truly inclusive

ways. The first thing we must tackle is our underlying belief about what we need to learn to do.

Since more than \$8 billion has been spent on diversity learning in the past decade,¹ let's start by examining the ROI we've gotten for this investment.

The Faulty Paradigm of Tolerance and Sensitivity

Say "diversity training" and many people will immediately think about learning experiences based on a paradigm of tolerance and sensitivity. This approach made sense 25 years ago when more women and racial/ethnic minorities began to enter sectors of the U.S. workforce once dominated by white males. As they did, they encountered intolerance and insensitivity. Hence the birth of "sensitivity training." Born out of the civil rights era and the transformative feminist movement, sensitivity training taught how to be tolerant toward differences. It was appropriate for the first generation of diversity work. The guys *did* have to be made aware that the pin-up calendars had to come down, that their sexist and racist banter about women and blacks had to stop, and that a female worker getting pregnant didn't mean she was not committed to her career. It was a disruptive time for old-timers and newcomers alike, as the workplace erupted in dislocations, antagonisms, fear, and explicit prejudice.

A generation later, tolerance and sensitivity work has established mechanisms for addressing the isms.

Tolerance is a good antidote to resistance and defensiveness on the part of majorities toward those who are different. It's a place of *truce* rather than *truth*. It's manifested in statements such as: "I won't resist you anymore." "I'll tolerate that you're here." "I'm okay, you're okay." "We'll agree to disagree." "Live and let live." It's the answer to, "Why can't we all just get along?"

Sensitivity takes it further. It finds its voice in statements such as: "I will work at understanding that you have unique needs and preferences." "When you say something bothers you and it doesn't make sense to me, I accept that it is important to you." "I won't question your views, and I won't resist them." In between the lines it says, "I'll let you have that gimme."

As a result of this approach, much *explicit* prejudice in the workplace has subsided or gone underground. Unfortunately, however, this paradigm has spent itself. It has been taken as far as it can, and it will not be enough to enable the transformation of global diversity.

The Inclusion Paradox

Why has this paradigm run out of juice? A few reasons:

- **Paralysis.** Regardless of what opinions people may harbor, employees generally know what is and is not appropriate to say. Political correctness has paralyzed us from talking in constructive ways about the very real differences between us. Even those who have welcomed diversity often don't know how to move beyond the obligatory, "I'm glad you're here."
- **Impractical.** Tolerance and sensitivity aren't very helpful when facing a colleague whose mother taught him the exact opposite of what yours taught you to do. It's an attitude, not a skill, that's condescending at worst or superficial at best, as we sponsor international and ethnic food potlucks and teach each other our culture's dance steps.
- **U.S.-Centric.** Tolerance and sensitivity do not serve us well in developing a platform for global diversity. It's a construct that flows out of the civil rights movement that gets sniffed out as too American as soon as it crosses the border. Don't get me wrong. Americans are right to be proud of the movement. In global work, however, this approach is limited due to its historical context.
- **Finger-pointing.** Tolerance and sensitivity undermine inclusion because of its implied audience. Who is it that needs to be more tolerant and sensitive? The white heterosexual male, of course! So he's in the audience, thinking, "Okay, I get this. This is all about me, but I don't feel part of it." Right there in inclusion training, an important part of the community is being excluded.

It's time for more powerful concepts that go beyond, "You've got yours and I've got mine." We need to create a voice that asks, "What is ours — *together*? Out of our differences, what new progress can we create — *together*? How can I make how you view the world a part of how I see it, too?"

What could replace this limited, spent paradigm? Today's global world requires a shift toward the paradigm of crosscultural competence.

The benefits are many:

- **Competency-based.** Crosscultural competence is not about an attitude or stance, but discrete, observable, and trainable skills and behaviors.
- **Pragmatic.** It's applicable to resolving daily diversity issues. When facing

that same colleague who learned something different on his mama's knee, it provides a means of resolving differing worldviews.

- **Globally relevant.** No matter where in the world I've presented or consulted, audiences readily acknowledge there are real differences in their midst — and they could use some skills to navigate them. Take Europe, for example. Europeans may have been quick to criticize diversity as an American thing, but crosscultural competence certainly resonates on a continent where cultural differences have led to wars, caricatures, and exasperation for a long time.
- **Versatile.** Given the expanding definition of diversity and the all-embracing nature of inclusion, it can be used in navigating all kinds of differences, not just traditional diversity issues. It's the same skill required to navigate differences in thinking styles, functional roles, organizational cultures coming together in a merger and acquisition, and so on.
- **HR system compatible.** Crosscultural competency can be embedded into an organization's performance, reward, recognition, and development system. Presented as just another set of expectations on which employees will be measured, the connection to work, expected outcomes, and pay rewards can be made clear.
- **Not accusatory.** No group, no matter how marginalized, has an inborn cross-cultural gene. The implied audience in crosscultural competence is all of us. So the white male is in the audience, thinking, "Ah, okay, I need this but so does everyone else."

With crosscultural competence, individuals and organizations can begin to see that we all need each other's differences. It's not a matter of simply tolerating, accepting, or even appreciating those differences in some esoteric way, but rather understanding on a fundamental level that we need those differences for our very survival. This puts an entirely different spin on diversity and inclusion.

Crosscultural competence requires us to look at our cultural differences, call them out, ask deep questions about their underlying assumptions, and suspend our own cultural judgments. (We all have them). We then need to tackle business or professional challenges based on what we've learned. It's an ongoing, ever-evolving practice with no finish line. It's the hard work required to succeed in the Obama Era and beyond.

The payoff can be both personally and professionally profitable in these upside-down times. The crosscultural and intercultural fields have much to offer

us in terms of tools and models to more competently navigate the cultural differences surrounding us.

**Diversity Across National Cultures:
Ayayay! Why Are the French So French, the Mexicans
So Mexican, and the Americans So American?**

Fons Trompenaars and Charles Hampden-Turner, European authors of *Riding the Waves of Culture: Understanding Diversity in Global Business*, were intrigued by how multinationals with strong corporate cultures, such as IBM, still struggled with national differences getting in the way of being able to work as effectively as they wanted. To better understand what was going on, they created an extensive survey with a series of “What would you do?” scenarios.

Here’s one: You’re riding in a car with a friend who you know is speeding. Suddenly, the flashing lights of a police car appear in the rear-view mirror. After pulling the car over, the officer asks you, “Was your friend speeding?” What would *you* answer? The answer depended on one’s nationality. Ninety-seven percent of Swiss would say, “Yes, my friend was speeding,” but only 32 percent of Venezuelans would give the same answer.² What’s going on?

The authors came up with seven different cultural dimensions to explain the different ways people from different cultures would approach the same scenario. In the case of the speeding car, they developed a construct that identified what individual cultures determine is fair. Some cultures believe that rules apply to everyone equally. Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner referred to them as *Universalist*. Other cultures determine what is fair based on the context of the situations. These, they referred to as *Particularist* cultures.

In returning to the case of the speeding ticket, one can now imagine the judgments flying. The Universalist turns to the Particularist and says, “How dare you lie to a police officer!,” while the Venezuelan turns to the Swiss and retorts, “How dare you betray a friend!”

Both want the same thing — fairness — but they have different ways of interpreting what fairness is. In their book, the authors explain how these kinds of worldview clashes happen daily in the workplace, as workers try to figure out whom to confer status to, how to get work done, and how to manage time, projects, and emotion.³

I Need Your Differences ... And You Need Mine

Here are the headlines from Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner's Seven Cultural Dimensions:

How do we define what's fair?

Universalism vs. Particularism

Focus on the rule vs. focus on the particular context.

How do we get things done?

Task vs. Relationship

Focus on the destination (outcomes) vs. focus on the journey/quality of the relationship.

How do we confer status?

Achievement vs. Ascription

Focus on the accomplishment vs. focus on the title.

Where do we get our sense of identity?

Individualism vs. Communitarianism

Identity comes from the self vs. identity comes from the group one is a part of.

How do we manage emotions?

Neutral vs. Affective

Focus on restraint in showing emotions vs. focus on showing them.

How do we define time?

Sequential Time vs. Synchronous Time

Time is linear; focus on one thing at a time vs. time is circular; focus on the big picture.

How do we manage our environment?

Internal Control vs. External Control

Focus on dominating the environment vs. focus on accepting whatever comes.

Before going any further, let me make a distinction between *archetypes* and *stereotypes*. An archetype is the tendency of a group of people to behave in a

certain way. A stereotype is the belief that all members in a cultural group behave according to the archetype for that group. For example, people from Latin America are more likely to show emotions publicly than people from Japan. But this does not mean all people from Latin America show public emotion or all people from Japan do not.

As individuals and organizations use the Seven Cultural Dimensions framework to diagnose cultural clashes, they find language and concepts to interpret and analyze the situation, back off the judgment, and then be able to resolve their differences. When this occurs, amazing things can happen.

An example can be found at furniture maker Herman Miller, where designers had been trapped in the Universalist mindset that they designed one-size-fits-all chairs based on an assumption of five-foot nine-inch medium-framed males. Michelle Hunt, the company's senior vice president for people during the 1980s, recalls, "This, of course, left out a lot of people and limited sales." Once they started seeing the market through more Particularist eyes, they began designing chairs that adjusted to a multiplicity of body shapes. Their sales exploded.⁴

The tenets of the Seven Cultural Dimensions have also helped me to be more successful in the corporate world. For several years, my friendships were hindered by different interpretations of how to demonstrate respect through the management of time. Soon after arriving in the United States to attend college, I found myself bewildered by a new European-American friend looking at his watch in the middle of a heart-to-heart conversation about our life aspirations. "Omigosh, Andrés, it's 12 o'clock. I've got to go. Here's my half for lunch," he exclaimed, plunking down his money and taking off. I was hurt and offended. How dare he leave in the middle of an intimate conversation just because the clock said it was 12 o'clock? "Cold, rude, impersonal Americans!" was my judgment.

As I soon discovered, I was causing hurt and offense on the other end as well. Later that same day, I showed up at another European-American's apartment to hang out. He opened the door and was clearly upset: "Andrés, what's the matter with you? It's 7:30. We were supposed to meet at 6 p.m. You're an hour and a half late!" In all likelihood, his judgment was something along the lines of, "Irresponsible, disorganized, inconsiderate Latino!"

This went on for *two* years. In comparing notes with other Latin American students, I soon learned they were experiencing the same thing. We were having two different interpretations of time. European-Americans tend to be "clock-ori-

ented” people, where time is defined by seconds, minutes, and hours. Conversely, Latin Americans are more “event-oriented.” Things, such as a conversation, last as long as they need to and the rest of the day adjusts to that. Using Trompenaars’ and Hampden-Turner’s language, the first is a Sequential view of time, the latter a Synchronous view of time.

Armed with this insight, conversations with my European-American friends changed. Not only did we have a better understanding of how we viewed time — and, therefore, that we were not being intentionally disrespectful to one another — but we also now had language to navigate through the differences:

“Hey, let’s get together this weekend!”

“Okay. Gringo time or Latino time?”

“Well, it depends. If it’s dinner and a movie, let’s make it gringo time because if we’re late for dinner, we’ll be late for the movie. And that’s no fun for anybody.”

“Okay. But if it’s come to our place to hang out, let’s make it Latino time, so we’re not running around getting all stressed out, you getting your place ready, and me battling traffic to hurry up to start right at 7 o’clock so we can ... relax!”

These seemingly minor mismatches and mutual judging of those who are different contribute to the underlying tensions between people. Its effect is to make inclusion more elusive. It’s also part of what contributes to the common phenomenon of higher turnover among those who are culturally different from the majority. Employees who are different from the norm often are assessed as poor performers, at worst, or just not top-notch talent, at best. Depending on the dominant culture of the organization, they may be seen either as too abrasive or too passive, too controlling or too submissive, too standoffish or too friendly. And on and on, the judgments go.

Not only is this detrimental to diverse individuals, it also hurts the organizations that hire them. This leads to higher turnover among people of color across all industries in the United States and among women in male-dominated industries around the world.⁵ Not only do employers have to deal with the costs of their replacement, but they also lose out on alternative ways of doing work. Baxter’s Don Wilson explains, “If you’re trying to solve your inclusion or diversity problems by just focusing on talent acquisitions, you’re not going to solve it. The acquisition piece only impacts less than 15 percent of your workforce. If you have a turnover of only 15 percent, that’s what you’re going to be replacing every year.

If the turnover is 20 percent, that's what you will be replacing. What about that 80 percent or whatever percentage of your workforce that exists today — how are you going to deal with that?"

In other words, employers can't think they're solving their diversity issues by merely bringing diverse talent into the workforce, only to have them leave in a year's time because they don't feel their different approaches are being understood or appreciated. This only contributes to a vicious cycle of replacing staff, which adds to the cost of replacement and frustrates existing employees — that 80 percent — who are continually having to adjust to a revolving door of new team members. Especially in a world where the rules are changing by the hour, we need innovative ways of looking at things. It requires seeing it through the very same perspectives many of us have been judging in negative ways.

Cultural dimensions can also explain different cultural groups' tendencies with regard to preventive health or with their long-term savings plans, a topic I turn to in a later chapter.

While much intercultural research has focused on exploring cultural differences between citizens of countries, frameworks like Trompenaars' and Hampden-Turner's can also be applied to differences of cultures within a country. Granted, very little has been done along these lines. However, Thomas Kochman, a white sociologist, has done some pioneering work in looking at the cultural differences between African-Americans and European-Americans.

In his book, *Black and White Styles in Conflict*, Kochman asserts that black and white Americans use two different communication styles for establishing trust: truth over peace or peace over truth.⁶ Though his book was written more than 20 years ago, Kochman's more recent research corroborates what he identified back then: that while both blacks and whites are looking to establish trust in communication, each group interprets and demonstrates the value of "trust" differently. Archetypically, African-Americans seek open and direct interactions, even to the point where vigorous disagreement occurs: truth over peace. The rationale is that, "I can trust a person who is this open — this honest — with me." However, white Americans generally seek to establish trust with a more indirect style focused on achieving peace. When approaching a point of conflict, they might simply agree to disagree. Peace is sought and valued. Their rationale is that, "I can trust a person who defers his or her position for the harmony of the relationship."

Given these differences, a white American with an indirect communication style might come away from an interaction with a black American demonstrating a more direct style, thinking, “Why is this person being so aggressive?” On the flip side, the African-American might come away thinking, “What is this person trying to hide?”

This concept can be applied in exploring the interactions of any two cultures where direct and indirect styles of communication come into play: U.S. East Coast vs. U.S. Midwest. U.S. American vs. Indian. German vs. Japanese. The list goes on.

For the past several years, some colleagues and I have presented at the National Black MBA conferences. In discussing the cultural differences between African-Americans and European-Americans, we introduce these differing cultural dimensions. During the audience participation section, the group usually determines that in six out of the seven dimensions African-Americans and European-Americans are on opposite sides. The same pattern emerges when doing this exercise with Latino and Indian audiences. No wonder there’s so much misunderstanding!

Everything Is Relative to Something Else

Along the way, I’ve realized that these dimensions serve as a relative scale between two cultures. As a Latino from an affective culture (one manages emotions by showing them), I’ve always viewed European-Americans as being from a neutral culture (one where emotions are not displayed). Compared to Latinos, they are. In working in our Canadian and U.K. offices and meeting with local clients, however, I’ve learned that both Canadian Anglophones and the British see European-Americans (their racial kin) as “emotional” — or to use the crosscultural terminology, “affective.” Compared to Anglos in Canada and England, they are.

These interpretations cannot be static. They must be dynamic. Compared to Northern Indian culture, are the French or Germans task- or relationship-based? Compared to Aboriginal Canadian culture, are Francophone Canadians sequential or synchronous? And how do Francophone Canadians compare on this same cultural dimension to Anglophone Canadians? The answers matter if one is to effectively navigate across various cultures. Not that one has to master every possible cultural permutation, but when work or personal circumstances bring us face-to-face with a new culture, success requires we possess this skill.

Why are affinity groups – among the most widely used diversity strategies – resisted so vehemently in France?

For the French, affinity groups are a strange concept. By contrast, Americans historically have had a mind-set that makes them more naturally predisposed to affinity groups. In 1835 sociologist Alexis de Tocqueville (who was ironically French) wrote in *Democracy in America* how he marveled at how Americans got things done through the power of “free association.” Americans accomplished things via what were basically *affinity groups* brought together by a common purpose.

Americans are naturally wired to organize themselves as groups to enact change. When discussing history, Americans frequently talk about affinity groups — Pilgrims, slaves, “Indians,” Italian immigrants, Irish potato famine refugees, undocumented Latinos. This is particularly true in politics, as evidenced by CNN’s digital voting map on election night. It offered an intense analysis of voting patterns by affinity group, answering questions such as, “What do low-income, white women from Appalachia want?”

By contrast, French history lacks a pattern of connection by affinity. Rather, family bonds were emphasized, so villages were organized and wars fought along bloodlines: the Hapsburgs vs. the Bourbons, for example. And election results are based more on right and left ideological votes than on voter demographics.

So why does an individualistic culture, such as that of America, paradoxically gravitate so easily toward communal affinity groups? To answer this question, let’s compare American individualism to French individualism by contrasting heroes. American individualistic heroes stand for society. Loner John Wayne fights for his community, not himself. Batman defends Gotham City. Captain America defends the nation. Even the Most Valuable Player of a sporting contest is positioned in the spirit of a team win.

“In contrast, French individualism is significantly more shaped by the French philosophers, and by a sense of personal exploration which is the purpose of one’s life,” says Helene Baudet, a French national working as project leader for diversity and inclusiveness, in Ernst & Young’s Global Diversity team. She explains that the “I think, therefore I am” worldview, where the self is at the center, leads away from communal heroes and toward French individualistic anti-heroes.

One such anti-hero is the comic book character Asterix, a non-muscular, disheveled iconoclast who fights for the village clan, rather than an affinity-based community. Baudet continues, “Other French heroes, like Le Petit Prince, Jean-Jacques Rousseau in ‘Les Confessions,’ Cyrano de Bergerac, Antoine Doinel (recurrent hero of Truffaut’s

films), have this in common: They are lonely products of a difficult childhood and no known parents. They are single men whose ambition is not to save the world, but to be the authors of their own lives. They spend a lot of time exploring their own emotions and speculating about the emotions of others, continuously debating the choices that will build their own identity and shape the relations they have with other individuals. Their goal in life seems to be to do things a la *premiere personne* — that is in the ‘I’ or ‘me’ sense. Truffaut himself says, ‘I see life as a very tough thing. I think one should have a very simple, very basic ethics: Say yes, yes to all, and do only what one wants to do.’”

“Mon dieu!,” the action-oriented John Wayne would say in his own way to these French iconic figures. While “The Duke” may never have *joined* an affinity group himself, his *raison d’être* was to help affect a win for people from a similar background.

As they encounter each other in global organizations, could American and French perspectives influence each other and converge at some point in the future? If, after all, the spirit of diversity work is to bring about positive change, does it really matter whether it happens through affinity groups making their voices heard or through individuals fighting for an ideal that benefits others?

Bicultural Is More Powerful Than Bilingual (though, of course, it helps to be bilingual)

For generations, parents have encouraged their kids to learn other languages for the sake of opening up their horizons and creating opportunities to connect with people from other lands. While English has been the *lingua franca* of global business, there’s an emerging power language that’s commanding attention: Chinese. (You thought I was going to say Spanish, didn’t you?) In an example of how emerging markets are bypassing the United States in their dealings with other markets, Chinese language academies are proliferating in Peru. “*El idioma del futuro es el chino*, the language of the future is Chinese,” a student told the Peruvian news magazine, *Cuarto Poder* after mouthing his first-ever Chinese words.

Being bi- or multilingual does indeed open up new opportunities, but language should be seen as only the tip of the iceberg of the deeper knowledge of other people’s worldviews within their cultures. While knowing more than one language is valuable in multiple ways, the benefit will be curtailed unless we also learn a country’s worldview. “It’s not enough to know the language, but also the

culture,” the student went on to tell *Cuarto Poder*, “to understand the Chinese way of thinking, which is so different to our Latin sensibilities.”

Says Dr. Milton Bennett, “I call it feeling of appropriateness. And the assumption is that this is typically lodged in embodied ethnocentrism. How do we get to have the feeling of appropriateness in another culture? If we are going to go do business in China, for example, it’s one thing to have the minimal and not very useful wallet card that says, ‘When in China, do this/don’t do that,’ etc. It’s a little bit better to have been through the program that says, ‘Here’s about U.S. culture, here’s about Chinese culture, and here are the differences that you should be paying attention to.’ But it’s unclear that that really brings us to the point of being able to go to China and feel what the appropriate thing to do is there. And yet for us to operate competently and effectively in that context, that’s what we need to be able to do. But how do we get there?”

Language actually contains the keys to these cultural insights. We may know how to say fluently, “*No gracias, estoy lleno*” (“No thank you, I’m full”) when offered a third serving at a Latin American home, but fluency may create an easier way to be disrespectful. In a culture where “no’s” are frowned upon, a “yes, please” in English would yield better results.

American vs. Indian Debate: Are Project Plans Necessary?

Accepting that differences exist and learning to call them out constructively sheds light on myriad daily interactions in increasingly multicultural teams, particularly when they involve teams from India. Much guidance about the differences between Indian and American cultures centers on tip-of-the-iceberg matters that, while important, are superficial. Numerous Web sites and travel guides offer advice such as, “Don’t pick up food with your left hand,” “Remove your shoes before entering private homes, places of worship, and even some shops and stores,” and “The Western side-to-side head shake doesn’t always mean ‘no.’”

But these bits of advice don’t explain the tension between Americans and Indians when it comes to project plans. Profound, below-the-waterline differences in worldviews come to a head among talented people on both sides with regard to how the work is going to get done.

At Hewitt, I had the opportunity to work in-person on crosscultural tensions surfacing with both sides of an implementation team in Gurgaon, India and

Lincolnshire, Illinois. All were highly committed to performance excellence, but misunderstandings and judgments were hindering progress.

“What is the thing that is most frustrating you about working with the Americans?” I asked the Indian team members.

“It’s the project plans!”

“What about them?”

“They keep asking for them.”

“And?”

“We haven’t produced them yet.”

“Why not?”

“We’ve got so many other more important things to be doing — the coding, the batch processes, the quality testing. We don’t really have the time to create these detailed project plans they are asking for.”

“Anything else?”

“It just feels like they don’t trust us.”

“Why do you say that?”

“We can’t help but feel that by their repeated asking for it, they don’t really believe that we can do the work. Rather than worrying about this document, about what we are going to do, we would rather just be doing it! We are all so committed to the project and we don’t want to let anyone down, especially our American colleagues. We will work ’round the clock if we need to, including the weekend, to get it done. A project plan is just a piece of paper. We have told them we will get it done. Why don’t they believe us?”

Back in the United States, I got in front of the other half of the team:

“What is the thing that is most frustrating you about working with the Indians?” I asked the American team members.

“It’s the project plans!”

“What about them?”

“We keep asking for them.”

“And?”

“They haven’t produced them yet.”

“Why not?”

“We just don’t know! They keep telling us that we’ll have them soon, but still nothing.”

“And why do you think this is?”

The Inclusion Paradox

It was in this moment that the assumption of similarity started to generate its uncomfortable side effects. If something so “simple” and “commonly understood” as project plans were not being produced, what explanations could there be for this except for ... No one wanted to say. Someone changed the topic.

“The other thing that’s frustrating is that when we go over there, there’s a lot more socializing than we feel there’s time for. We’re only there for a few days, and we need to make the most of our time.”

With both groups, I introduced various crosscultural concepts and models, including the Seven Cultural Dimensions. After talking them through these, I asked the Americans, “So, as a task-oriented group, how can you get comfortable spending a little more time socializing with your Indian colleagues so they feel respected?”

We went ’round and ’round until finally an astute American said, “I know! I’ll make relationship building a task that goes into my project plan, maybe with a subtask of going out to dinner the first night we’re there. And maybe with a note to self that says, ‘Don’t talk too much about business. Keep it personal.’” To which another American added, “Yeah, and when we get back to the hotel from dinner, we can pull out our project plan and check it off!” Amidst the laughter of self-recognition, there was relief.

In India, I asked the group there, “So, as a relationship-based group, how can you get comfortable creating that project plan for the Americans in order to reduce their anxiety?”

We went ’round and ’round until finally, an astute Indian said, “I know! For the sake of the relationship, we will create the project plan.”

Not only does mutual adaptation improve team dynamics, it actually enhances each of the subteams’ performance. Project planning invites consideration of time off due to holidays, vacations, and illness. At the same time, it triggers contingency planning to account for the upcoming monsoon season’s weather-related power outages. Relationship building on the front end invites greater benefit of the doubt when time zone, language, and cultural differences create tears in the project’s fabric. Personal connection reverses the emotional energy that, rather than ripping the fabric further, channels it toward mending the tear.

As a guy who moves through time in an event-oriented way, learning about clock-oriented time has enhanced my ability to execute my visionary ideas more efficiently and effectively. Conversely, the clock-oriented people in my life have

found their experiences enriched by more consistently discovering the gestalt of the event itself.

In the end, it's not enough to tolerate differences or learn more about them. In the upside-down, 24/7 world of the Obama Era, to be successful means I need your differences. And you need mine. ☞

The Cappuccino Effect

In an in-depth interview for this book, Dr. Milton Bennett shared the following observation with me in his inimitable style:

One of my earlier experiences in Italy was to do what is commonly done here in the United States, which is to order a cappuccino after dinner. Following my normal procedure of always asking first, I was assured by my host that it was a perfectly fine thing, although strange, but certainly okay in this very international restaurant.

And so I said, "I'll have a cappuccino," to the waiter who looked at me rather ironically and said, "Would you like a brioche with that?" A brioche is a *breakfast* bread and I realized that I had been skewered.

As I spend more time in Italy, an interesting thing has happened. I have developed an antipathy to ordering cappuccino after dinner. In fact, the very thought of a cappuccino that late in the day is now more or less *disgusting* to me. I'm thinking, why would *anybody* do that? Yet I remember that at the time, I felt perfectly fine about ordering that cappuccino. And I also felt surprised at being taken to task.

Since then, when trying to behave appropriately in an unfamiliar culture, I've started paying attention to "How do I *feel* about that?" Although this is about a very small thing, it is a very big change. It's a change in how one makes an assessment about what the right thing to do is.

And this is the point: How is it that we know what is correct behavior? In our own society we're socialized into a whole constellation of correct behaviors, which mostly we don't have in our head. Mostly we just do them. You ask somebody, "Why do you do that?" and they say, "Because it's the right thing to do." And if you ask them even more deeply, "Well tell me how do you *know* that's the right thing to do." Usually they'll come to the point of saying, "Well, it just *feels* right." It just feels right, whether it's ordering cappuccino or approaching your boss for a promotion. It can be a very serious matter or it can be a very superficial matter, but it still just feels right or not.

The Inclusion Paradox

I call it “the feeling of appropriateness.” Or using intercultural terms, it’s a case of embodied ethnocentrism. The feeling is in our body. The feeling of wanting that cappuccino is a physical feeling and the feeling of not wanting it is a physical feeling, too. The difficulty in moving out of one set of feelings and into another set of feelings is the essence of ethnocentrism.

We have our feelings that are centralized in one cultural context. So it seems to me that another cutting-edge issue is, how do we get the feeling of appropriateness in another culture? Say we are going to go do business in China, it’s one thing to have the minimal and, by the way, not very useful thing of the wallet card that says when in China do this/don’t do that — but it’s unclear how to go to China and feel what the appropriate thing to do is there.

Yet for us to operate competently and effectively in that context, that’s what we need to be able to do. But how do we get there? How do we *feel* what is right?

This is what I call the Cappuccino Effect.

I Need Your Differences ... And You Need Mine

SUMMARY POINTS

- Every minute in the corporate world, someone who is different from the mainstream is feeling excluded — even in companies that are committed to diversity.
- The Inclusion Paradox requires that we not only acknowledge the differences among us, but learn to navigate those differences as well.
- The current paradigm for diversity and inclusion training, which relies on sensitivity and tolerance, is inadequate for meeting the next phase of diversity and inclusion.
- Crosscultural competence is the ability to discern and take into account one's own and others' worldviews, to be able to solve problems, make decisions, and resolve conflicts in ways that optimize cultural differences for better, longer-lasting and more creative solutions.
- Crosscultural competence is a learnable skill that everyone needs. Once acquired, it leads to the understanding that we all need each others' differences.
- Authors Fons Trompenaars and Charles Hampden-Turner explain Seven Cultural Dimensions that describe various cultural worldviews:
 - Universalism vs. Particularism
 - Task vs. Relationship
 - Achievement vs. Ascription
 - Individualism vs. Communitarianism
 - Neutral vs. Affective
 - Sequential Time vs. Synchronous Time
 - Internal Control vs. External Control
- *Archetype* and *stereotype* are not interchangeable terms. An archetype is the tendency of a group of people to behave in a certain way, while a stereotype is the belief that all members of a cultural group behave according to a specific archetype.

SHAPING YOUR STRATEGY

- How well do diversity champions in your organization understand that crosscultural competency is foundational in order to be able to move the work forward? How can you tap into those who do understand in order to deepen your organization's crosscultural competency? What things can you do to help those who don't make the paradigm shift from tolerance and sensitivity to crosscultural competence?
- How would you describe your organizational culture using the Seven Cultural Dimensions?
- Pick any minority cultural group in your organization. How does that group's archetype compare and contrast to the description of your company's preferred cultural dimensions?