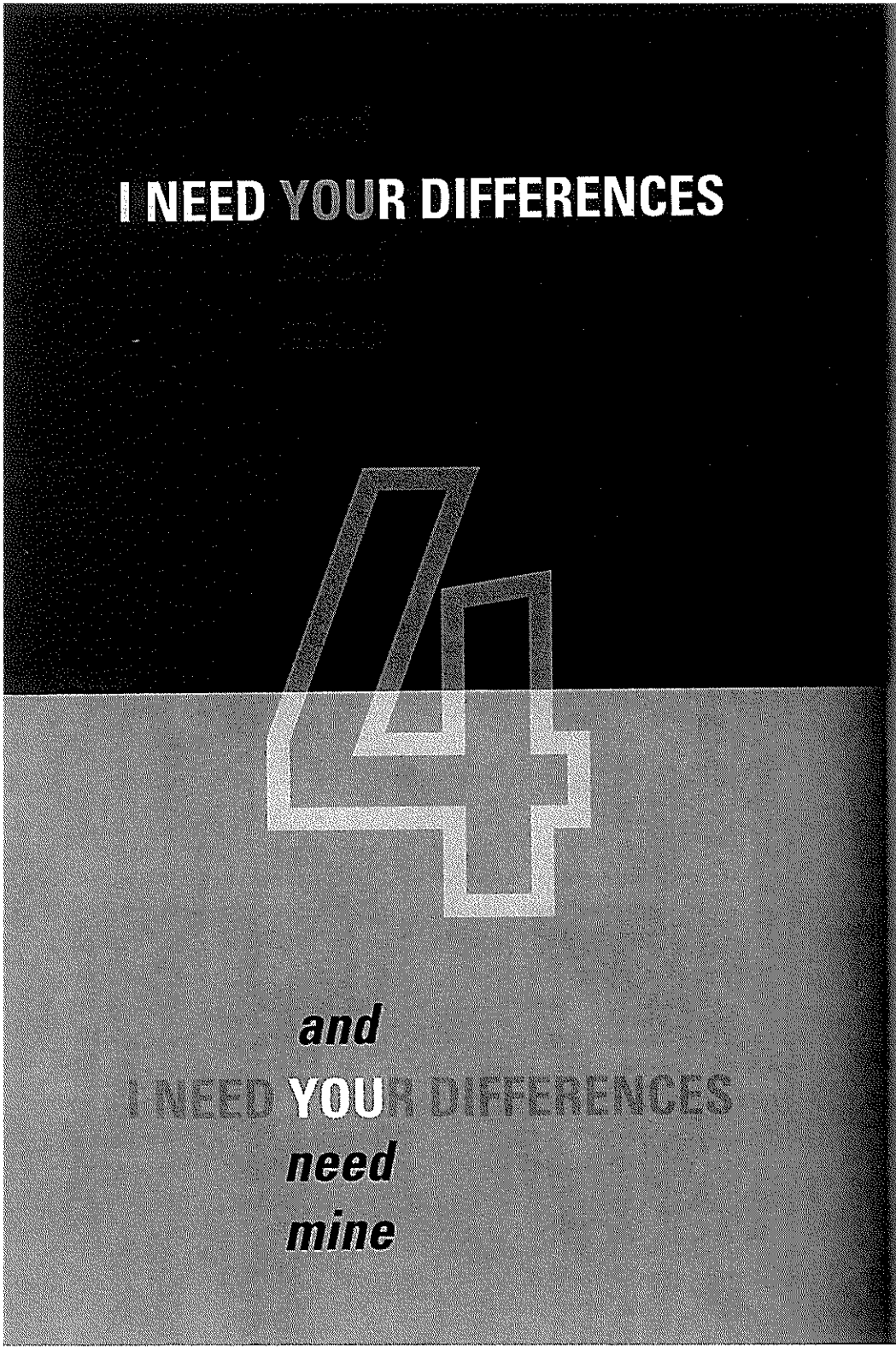
Andrés T. Tapia

HEWITT ASSOCIATES

THE INCLUSION PARADOX

The Obama Era and the Transformation of Global Diversity



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.

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]

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-oriented" 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, dishevveled 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'etre 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?"

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.

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?

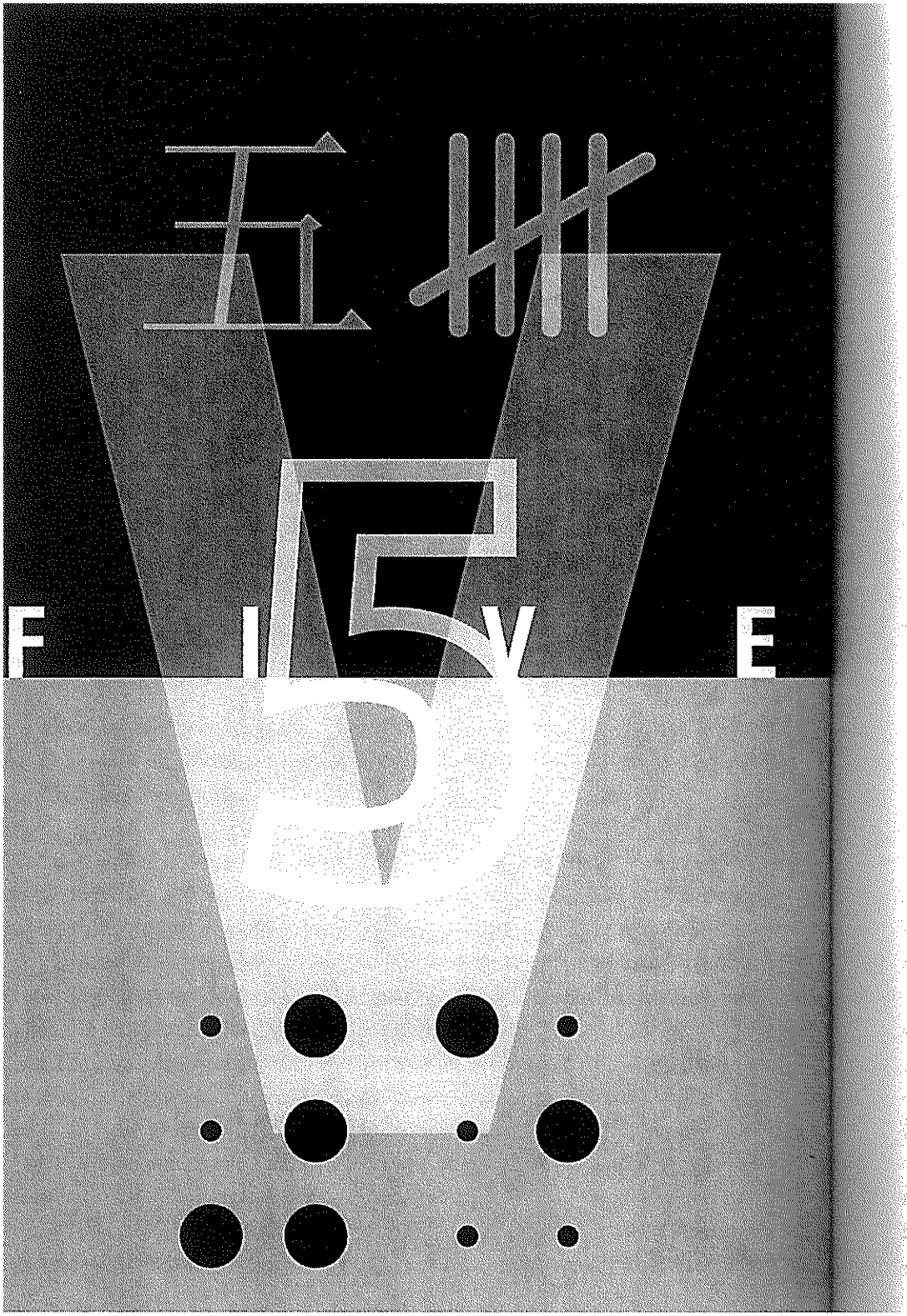
This is what I call the Cappuccino Effect.

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?



Chapter 5

Are You Evil, a Moron, or Just Plain Incompetent?

Lori and I had been married only a short time when we decided to throw a party. In her German-American Midwestern way, Lori pulled out a note pad and said, "Okay, let's make an invite list." Quickly, we came up with about 25 friends and coworkers.

After we completed that task, Lori went on to deal with all the specific details for party planning — menu selection, music and entertainment, house preparation, and so on. Plans for the party were well under way. The following week, as I ran into friends and colleagues on the train, at work, or in the neighborhood, I would inevitably say, "Hey, Mark — we're having a party two weeks from Saturday. Here's my address. Be sure to come. And pass the word on!" When I mentioned to Lori that I'd invited Mark, Melinda, and Fareed, I got the look. "Are they on the invitation list?" she asked frostily. "Well, no. But hey, that was just to get us started." "Oh, *really*?" was her reply.

To Lori's way of thinking, the 25 names on the list represented the sum total of people who would attend our celebration. To *my* way of thinking, the invitation list was only the starting point for all the people who could possibly attend. *Todo el mundo* ("the whole world") is a phrase that frequently comes up in communal Latin America when discussing who's invited to a party or other social event. Rather than limiting an invitation list, as would be customary in the more

individualistic United States, in Latin America, it's about expanding it. What Lori and I had was one invitation list, 25 names, and two culturally different ways of interpreting it. What started as a party for 25 turned into a whirlwind celebration of more than one hundred.

And so it has gone — navigating the deep waters of cultural differences, running aground in the shoals of cultural friction. As we found out quickly and painfully, cultural differences can seriously derail personal relationships, not only with one's spouse, but also with friends and coworkers.

Here's where it all begins to either fall apart or create something new. When someone does something different from what we've been trained to believe is the norm, we can only assume they are either incompetent or bad people. Why else would they do it that way? When we think about cultural misunderstandings with those close to us, don't we often end up being furious at their insensitivity? Steamed about their moronic behavior? Outraged at their selfishness?

Dianne Hofner-Saphiere, a crosscultural consultant with vast global experience, explains, "The most challenging thing is to get people to understand that their common sense *isn't common.* Common sense is really cultural sense. It's what you're expecting."

I Discovered My Latin Soul in Washington's Wheat Fields

My dad, Fernando Andrés Tapia Mendieta — the son of two school teachers from the fishing town of Pisco in Peru — earned his doctorate of medicine at San Marcos University in Lima. He came to the Cleveland Clinic to do his first residency as a cardiologist. My mom came from the small town of Harrington, Washington, 50 miles west of Spokane. She had always dreamt of getting out of small-town America, so she enrolled herself in an electrocardiogram technician certification program, also in Cleveland. So, between the heartbeats, the cardiologist and the EKG technician met, married, and moved to Chicago, where my father completed his second residency at Edgewater Hospital, where I was born.

When I was 1 year old, my parents got into their green Comet, drove to the port of San Francisco, hopped on a cargo ship, and sailed to the port of Callao off the coast of Lima, where I grew up.

Spanish was our first language at home, with English a close second. This bilingualism was interwoven with biculturalism. One night, we'd be having *arroz con pollo*, the next night meat loaf and potatoes. We celebrated Peruvian Independence Day *and* American Thanksgiving, complete with turkey and stuffing — though cranberry sauce was impossible to get since no one knew what my mom was talking about when she asked for it at the store. She told us about Halloween, so my siblings and I dressed up as goblins and cowboys and knocked on people's doors and called out, *"Treekohtree!"* (our butchered version of "trick or treat"). People had no idea why there were goblins and cowboys at their doorstep, but since we looked so cute, they gave us money. We quickly learned that the bigger the house, the more money we got. We pulled in quite a haul — my first inkling that becoming crossculturally adept could be profitable!

I first discovered differences when, as a third grader, I went to visit my American grandparents in my mom's hometown of Harrington over summer break. Coming to the United States from Peru was already loaded with major culture shock differences, which were compounded by the contrast between Lima, a city of 6 million at the time, and Harrington, population 500. Then there were the urban/rural differences of pace, noise, animals, and occupations — just to name a few.

I stood out immediately. Though I'm not that dark-skinned, I was the darkest person there. I spoke with a heavy Spanish accent, and when they threw a ball at me, I would kick it. During this visit, I experienced both the underside and the upside of being different. There were taunts and mean-spirited jests about my foreignness. But there was also the genuine interest, on the part of the town folk, in this son of a native daughter — Jackie Kay Graham, my mom. And so I was invited to ride on the combine during wheat harvest season, to give a slide show on Peru at the Methodist church potluck, and to play Little League baseball for the first time.

It was in Washington's Lincoln County wheat fields that I discovered my Latinness. Until I was out of the culture I had grown up in and immersed in another, I had little appreciation for the many ways in which my identity was outlined by the *absence* of the familiar cultural icons and customs of my upbringing. Surrounded by people who didn't look or speak like I did made me aware of the unique ways I looked and spoke. Here is where I realized I was a Latin American from Peru and started to get an inkling of what that meant.

Returning to Lima, I continued my education in a parochial school run by American nuns. I then prepared to go to college by getting a Peruvian and American high school diploma at the American High School of Lima. In Roosevelt's classrooms I discovered the life-sustaining literature of Poe, Faulkner, and Melville along with that of Borges, Vargas Llosa, and Neruda. I learned about George

Washington's defiance of the British in his Christmas crossing of the Delaware in one class period, and about Tupac Amaru's rebellion in Cusco against the Spaniards in the next.

Every few years, I went back to Harrington, this time with my three younger sisters, to visit my grandparents, Brownie and Frieda. I played flag football, earned five bucks an hour pulling rye from a wheat field for a farmer who had mixed up his seeds, and watched the *Sha Na Na* show with my grandpa while munching on M&Ms. In turn, I taught my classmates where Peru was on a map, how to get by with a few choice Spanish phrases, and that when I threw a ball at them — to kick it. I told them stories of going to bullfights, professional soccer games, and political demonstrations.

By the time I arrived at Northwestern University to study journalism, I believed I was ready. I had even worked on my accent using my mom's voice as my internalized language tape. I would hear myself speak in an accented way and then repeat the same word ten times to match how she would say it.

But I was far from ready. So much of my preparation was tip-of-the-iceberg stuff — necessary, but only a beginning. I was soon to discover that most of my cultural differences were below the waterline. With icebergs, it's what's below the waterline that sinks *ships*. With culture, it's what's below the waterline that sinks *relationships*.

I've already shared my story of the differences between the Latin-American and European-American interpretation of time, but there were many other profound differences. As I relate these other stories, some of you may sheepishly recognize yourself in them because you've tripped the crosscultural wire in similar ways. Or you may end up scratching your head, asking, "Why would he do *that*?" And that is the point. We must come to appreciate the power of our differences and, as crazy (asinine, dumb, rude, weird may come to mind as well) as they may sound to us, understand that our ways can seem just as strange to others as theirs do to us. By sharing our stories, we can begin to forge new understandings where we can relate in more inclusive ways with one another.

Yeah, Right

As a student at Northwestern, there was a problem paying my tuition every month. I had financial aid, but my dad still had to pay a portion. Now, keep in mind that my dad was in Peru. The country was undergoing hyperinflation and terrorism, and there were restrictions on transferring money out of the country.

To get around these multiple issues, Dad had to send cash with people he trusted who were flying from Peru to the States. I was depending on these flights to receive the money Dad sent for my tuition. But they weren't just flying to Chicago. They might be flying to Miami or Los Angeles. The money eventually came, but it could be two, four, even eight weeks late.

Tuition was due on the 15th of the month, with a $50 late fee applied on the 16th. So, on the 15th, I'd go to the Bursar's office, where students made tuition payments, and say, "My money isn't in yet." Every month, the clerk would say, "There's a $50 fine for being late." I would explain, "The money is on its way. It's coming from Peru. There's inflation, terrorism, restrictions on dollars. Can't you make an exception?" The university's response, from a Universalist point of view, was always the same: "If we make an exception for *you*, we'd have to make an exception for *everyone*." Exasperated, I would retort in true Particularistic fashion, "How many students do you have who come from a country 6,000 kilometers away where there is a 15,000 percent cumulative hyperinflation rate, a growing terrorist movement igniting car bombs in the Capitol, and restrictions for getting dollars out of the country?!"

So what was fair? One rule applied to everyone equally or taking into account that people's experiences could be very different? Every month, I fought with the administrator at the Bursar's office, and every month, I lost. The Universalist university system had no way to accommodate me. And so round and round we went as the Bursar and I drove each other crazy.

My parents sure had not prepared me for *this*.

Yours, Mine, and Ours

In the meantime, I was also driving my roommate, Leroy, crazy.

As someone coming from a communal culture, I had no problem borrowing people's things. My operating assumption was it was okay for me to borrow from others without asking, even if they weren't around.

I had come to school quite unprepared. Having not visited the campus beforehand due to cost and distance, I hadn't known what to bring. So I borrowed a slew of things like staplers, scissors, shampoo, and tennis rackets. Through various awkward moments, I eventually figured out I should not borrow without asking. It was important in American culture to ask permission. Ah! Okay, I got it. But there was a part two to the borrowing rule I was clueless about. Now I

was asking, but I was doing it too often. It took me a while to figure out that one should only borrow sparingly and apologetically. "Why don't you have your own things? Get your own!" I started to hear in response as I applied part one of the borrowing lesson. I was so puzzled. "Why should I get my own if you're not using it? And this goes both ways. You can use anything I own — it actually would make me happy." But it didn't work that way. Coming from a developing country, I had a lot less that he would want to borrow — and he simply did not feel comfortable doing it.

When I became a homeowner many years later, I had to relearn the borrowing lessons. One neighbor had a lawnmower, another had an extension ladder, and a third had a snow blower. I had stuff, too, like an oil change drip pan, a shovel, and a rake. It took some time to figure out that even though I kept borrowing things from them, no one was borrowing from me. I just couldn't figure out why each household should have one of everything when these tools sat idle 95 percent of the time.

Since college, the crosscultural experiences have continued unabated, whether in the publishing and corporate worlds or on working trips to Kenya, India, Canada, the United Kingdom and throughout Latin America. Each time, there are new and surprising things to discover about myself, my friends, and colleagues in our close encounters of a cultural kind. Each time, there is a lesson to be gleaned to smooth out crosscultural interpersonal clashes. Such encounters also sharpen our insights into how differences make a difference in relationships and organizations — from how we work together to how we design human resource programs to how we market and deliver products and services.

I'm Not Okay. You're Not Okay.

My first job was at a magazine called *U. Magazine*, a publication geared toward college students of the Intervarsity Christian Fellowship in Downers Grove, Illinois. I was one of only two minorities in an office of about 55 people.

They were a caring group. I learned a lot during that time and made some lifelong friends. But boy, did I feel the differences. I was a communal, particularistic, synchronous, expressive, externally-controlled Latino guy in the midst of an individualistic, universalist, sequential, emotionally-neutral, internally-controlled culture. To those who are familiar with Myers-Briggs personality tool, I was an ENFP in an ISTJ milieu.[1] To compound the differences, I had grown up in a non-

air-conditioned world and loved the heat, so I often felt cold in U.S. office buildings. Every summer, I would close my office door, open my window, and create a tropical oasis in my workspace. No one could stand being in my office. Even my packed lunch with the previous night's leftovers was problematic with its strong aromatic smells wafting in the small lunchroom as I heated it in the microwave.

The very things that worked for the majority didn't work for me and vice versa. They got the benefit of richer reporting due to a greater diversity of sources and an alternative way of looking at things. I had to learn to create a detailed project plan. I perfected my English grammar syntax and adopted more of a storytelling approach. I changed to peanut butter and jelly sandwiches for the office lunch room, and my colleagues came with me to ethnic restaurants.

Crosscultural interpersonal lesson: It's all about mutual adaptation. To trigger a good reciprocal and virtuous cycle, the one in the minority often needs to be the first mover — whether an American in Lima or a Peruvian in Downers Grove — not just through assimilation but also through adaptation. In response, those from the majority culture need to be welcoming of those who are different, show genuine interest in who they are and what they have to offer, and adapt in return.

Out of Africa

This mutual adaptation often comes about through a process of trial and error. As we get to know each other and our different cultural norms and practices, we begin to understand where the other person is coming from. Through this process, we tailor our respective approaches and eventually come together. I experienced this shortly after college during my first trip to Africa with my wife, Lori, who was doing field study in ethnomusicology. As if dealing with crosscultural issues in the United States weren't tough enough, they were exponentially harder in Kenya, yet I attribute this experience for contributing to the growth of my own crosscultural competence.

That summer, Lori and I spent time in Nairobi, Mombassa, and Malindi. But for most of our stay, we were with the Sabaot people in Mount Elgon on the Kenya-Uganda border, where people lived in mud huts insulated with cow dung and covered with thatch roofs.

As a passionate soccer fan and player, I always brought my soccer ball with me. Through my many travels, I had often been able to make connections by kicking the ball with people who spoke different languages and had different

customs — whether with Cape Verdeans in Boston, Quechuas in the Peruvian Andes, or tots in kindergarten in Highland Park.

The day we caught the train to Mount Elgon from Nairobi, I forgot my soccer ball. Given how much emotional investment I had in my making-cultural-bridges-through-my-soccer-ball plan, I was devastated. I had counted on it being my lifeline to bridge cultural gaps. It was also my cultural prop. I only knew a smattering of words in Swahili, and those didn't go much further than *Asante* and even fewer in Sabaot. I had no family links in Kenya, and I'd never been this far from home. I felt very vulnerable.

The Land Rover picked us up at the train station and made steep climbs up the mountain around gigantic craters and through lush vegetation teeming with baboons, cows, donkeys, and elephants. I felt exhilaration and dread at the same time. Soon, Lori got invited to various ceremonies to record the music of such milestone events as birth, coming of age, marriage, and death.

Wherever we went, the Sabaot were hospitable and welcoming — not to mention complimentary of my gum boots and jeans, to which I always said "thank you," only to discover they were more communal than my Latin self. I was perceived as rude and materialistic because when people complimented something I had, I was supposed to give it to them. And here I thought they were just being nice! The community was poor, and even though we were only three years out of college, we were viewed as wealthy. But it was not just an income difference at play. Communally, I was expected to reciprocate their appreciation for my gum boots with a gift of that very footwear. I came to understand that, thanks to the help of one of my Sabaot friends, Christopher. When we left the mountain and were done slogging through the mud, I gave him my gum boots and jeans.

Another time, a large group of our newfound friends took us on a two-day hike to the top of a mountain, which was really a dormant volcano. On the way up, we stopped to meet one of our Sabaot friend's nearly 100-year-old grandmother. The greetings were formal, hierarchical, and full of symbolic meaning. The Sabaot subsisted on farming, and rain was both essential and capricious. When offering one's hand in greeting, the elder person spits on it as a blessing. One responds in kind. Since we were a large delegation of visitors, our friend's elderly grandmother worked her way through blessing each one of us. I was the last one. By the time she got to me, my salivary glands were so worked up and ready that, well, let's just say I *really* blessed her.

Halfway through our time there, Lori was recording a children's song with some girls next to where the just-harvested corn was being husked. Suddenly, a small, round object rolled by my feet. It was about eight-inches in diameter and made of balled-up plastic bags held together by twine. I looked in the direction of where it had come from. There, I saw a group of boys and men playing a game I knew very well. I picked up their soccer ball and drop-kicked it over to them. They waved me over to join them. *Yes!*

Interpersonal lesson: No matter how much you prepare ahead of time, there is no way to avoid mistakes. You will embarrass yourself, but your good intentions go a long way. It's all in the recovery, as you work it through the necessary, trusted cultural informant. To call out differences constructively, find points of commonality — though they will likely be on *their* terms, not yours.

India: My Polite Is Impolite

Prasheel and I had a great day together in the crosscultural train-the-trainer in our Hewitt offices in Gurgaon. Along with 25 of our colleagues, we had experienced exhilaration — of facing perplexing cultural dilemmas, discovering the breakthrough insights of what was going on, and having that understanding enable our ability to work together. To celebrate that successful first day, Prasheel took a group of us to an Indian restaurant for dinner. I worked my way through plates of this, that, and the other. We shared many laughs and learned much from each other that day and over dinner.

When it came time to say good night, Prasheel walked me to the outside of the restaurant so we could hail a taxi. As one was pulling up, I reached out my hand, and he took it. But when I said, "Thank you, Prasheel," I could see him visibly pull back. The smile on his face disappeared, and a grave formality descended between the two of us. I knew something had gone amiss, but I didn't know what.

"Anything the matter?" I asked him.

"Um…"

Sensing the awkwardness, I decided to lean into our crosscultural work of the day.

"No need to answer now if you don't know. But given how we talked today about calling out differences and how we need to do that as they come up, rather than assuming similarity, this may be one of those times."

By now, the cab had pulled up and the door was open, waiting for me to get

in. I did, and a lively day came to a close in a less than ideal way.

The next morning, Prasheel jovially came up to me as soon he saw me.

"Good morning, Andrés. I hope you had a good night's sleep. And by the way, I think I know what transpired last night."

"Yes?"

"It was the moment you said, 'thank you.'"

"'Thank you?' What's wrong with that?"

"Well, it can be seen as rude or inconsiderate."

"Yikes! Back in the United States, it would be rude and inconsiderate to not say it! Please explain."

"For us, 'thank you' implies that someone did something for you that they would not have wanted to do. It is said in response to someone doing things out of an obligation. When you said 'thank you,' to my Indian ears, it sounded like a dismissal of our newly evolving professional relationship and friendship. Taking you out to dinner was something I wanted to do for you in appreciation. You made me feel like it was done out of duty, a must-do."

"Ayayay!" I replied. After explaining the Spanish meaning of this expression — "Wow and my God" rolled into one — I said, "This is so helpful. Now I understand why Americans often think Indians are rude because they don't say 'please' and 'thank you.' But I still need more help. Because gratitude is clearly something you value here in India, as you have clearly stated that your taking me out to dinner was a way of showing that, how do I demonstrate my gratitude in return if I can't say 'thank you'?"

"When I'm up in Chicago next month, take me out to dinner."

Which, you can bet, I did!

Interpersonal lesson: We often have the same value, but a different interpretation. Gratitude was the shared value, but we clearly had different interpretations of how to show it. Our ways of showing gratitude were considered ungrateful, the very opposite in our respective cultures! If we had not established a protocol and assumption of the need to call out differences, that awkward exchange outside the restaurant would have remained unspoken for the rest of our relationship. This is just one example of awkward, unexplainable, can't-put-your-finger-on-it-but-it-didn't-feel-right kinds of comments that infest crosscultural relationships. By being able to respectfully call out the differences, we were able to discover where our relationship veered off the path of trust and get back on it.

In the Corporate World: The Power of Teamwork Using Differences

As you become more crossculturally competent as an individual, the next challenge is to create and nurture a crossculturally competent team with healthy interpersonal relationships. This does not mean these relationships won't be without friction. In fact, the more diverse the team, the more *guaranteed* the friction.

As has been an underlying premise of the Inclusion Paradox, diversity is more complex to manage than homogeneity. That said, diversity is not only a demographic inevitability, but also a requirement for innovation. The innovative, creative combustion of a diverse team can either lead to destructive explosions or generative bursts. As in one-on-one interactions, team relationships across cultural divides require shared knowledge and understanding of crosscultural issues. Also needed are skills to manage these differences and a commitment to doing so. This intentionality channels the friction in ways that move the work forward.

Here's a panoramic snapshot of what happens on my diversity and inclusion team at Hewitt:

Tyronne Stoudemire, Global D&I Director, and Susan McCuistion, Global D&I Operational Leader, are two very different people in more ways than just gender diversity. At the tip of the iceberg, Tyronne is an African-American from Detroit and Susan is a biracial white/Native American (Oneida tribe) from Las Vegas. Below the waterline, the differences only get magnified.

When Tyronne and Susan worked on my team, they were both responsible for operationalizing strategies, though in different spheres of responsibility. Susan was very task-oriented, while Tyronne was very relationship-oriented. Our project-related interactions sound something like this:

"Hey, Susan! I have an idea for a new strategic initiative. I want to get your thoughts on whether we can get it done by mid-June."

After I would explain it, Susan immediately would start sketching out the tasks, sub-tasks and sub-sub-tasks. She would figure out how many days each one would take, factoring in holidays, workloads, slippage, vacations, *and* the probability of sick days. Then, Susan would map out the timeline, along with project details, and say:

"Andrés, I know that you want it mid-June, but because of these other issues, I'll need an extra two weeks. So let's plan on the first week of July for a final completion date."

Contrast Susan's response with Tyronne's:

"Hey, Tyronne! I have an idea for a new strategic initiative. I want to get your thoughts on whether we can get it done by mid-June."

After I explained it, Tyronne immediately would start verbally brainstorming:

"I know so-and-so is going to be in town at a conference ... maybe I can bring him in. I don't know anybody in this other area, but I know someone who knows someone in that particular area. I know that you want to have this done by mid-June, but if we plan on doing it early in July, we can piggyback on another conference when one of the speakers will already be in town."

Same end date, but approached in an entirely different way.

Given these two disparate approaches, Tyronne and Susan sometimes drove each other a little crazy. Both were very effective, but their processes differed in nuanced ways. They operated on completely different systems. Susan's anxiety rose when she didn't see a written plan. Tyronne's anxiety rose when he didn't see a list of the right people who would be contacted and drawn into the process.

Tyronne's cell phone was his baton for directing his project orchestra. Susan's project plan was hers. Each made music in their own way. Check out the table below for the harmonic and discordant notes of their styles as they worked together:

	TYRONNE	SUSAN
Focus is getting the job done through	Relationships	Tasks
Mantra	Seize the day!	Plan ahead!
Highest priority	Front stage	Back stage
Leads work team's symphony with	His cell phone	Her project plan
Shortcuts	Know the right people	Cut back scope
Sounds the alarm	We don't know the right people!	We don't have enough time or resources!
Source of anxiety in working with the other	Her structure	His spontaneity
Source of learning in working with the other #1	Her structure	His spontaneity
Source of learning in working with the other #2	Leverage project tools to structure fluid working relationships	Leverage relationships to lubricate rigid tasks

The power of diversity is that every worldview offers something someone needs. When it comes to turning strategy into tangible projects and programs, I need diverse talents and perspectives on my team. Having both Tyronne's and Susan's widely divergent approaches broadened and deepened our group's reach and impact. And yes, I had them focus on doing things that played to their strengths. The diversity and crosscultural curriculum that so far has been rolled out to more than 15,000 associates and clients worldwide lends itself better to a task orientation. Creating a strategic networking alliance of high-powered corporate, not-for-profit, and government leaders who can have much impact in the global diversity field lends itself better to a relational approach.

As a Diversity and Inclusion "Center of Expertise," we'd better practice what we preach, right? Sure, piece of cake. No hay problema. Hakuna matata. *Right.*

You bet it's not easy. We have to work hard to make this work or our differences could undo us. So we're intentional in talking through the impact of our differences in our interpersonal and working relationships. We have to remind ourselves to assume positive intent on the part of the other, to be self-aware of how our worldview may lead to subjective interpretations, to listen intently to our colleague's side, and finally, to navigate toward resolution. The waters can be rough, but like white-water rafters, we need to expertly navigate the rapids through the myriad rocks and bends.

You bet it pays off. When worked right, it leads to richer relationships that pave the way for more innovative and memorable results.

Leaders Learning Through Relationships

The most transformative experience I've witnessed in developing interpersonal crosscultural competence at work came about through the development of a program by Mary-Frances Winters of the Winters Group and myself. Initially developed for Hewitt leaders, we now offer the program, dubbed Crosscultural Learning Partners, to our clients.

Here's how it works. Twenty-five senior Hewitt leaders were partnered with someone culturally different from themselves for a year. After an initial group kickoff — including a personalized and confidential IDI debrief (explained in book's Appendix A) — they received monthly assignments via email of an article or book chapter to read, or a movie to watch, that touched on a diversity/cross-cultural issue. The senior leaders also received a set of reflection questions that

touched on their individual worldviews — to help process with their partner what they read or watched — along with a set of application questions of how to apply what they learned to Hewitt's day-to-day realities. They shared each other's cultural identity stories and points of view in the context of these assignments and were often surprised by unexpected similarities and differences in how they interpreted the very same thing.

At the end of the experience, all participants retook the IDI. As a group, they had all progressed in their crosscultural competence. Their testimonials sounded like this:

A Human Resources leader speaking about the Gen X African-American trainer with whom he was partnered: "Charles [not his real name] helped me see around corners I would not have ever been able to see around. I especially realized this when he took me to the Chicago Theater for an evening debate among Tavis Smiley, host of *Tavis Smiley, Late Night* on PBS TV talk show, Cornel West, author and professor at Princeton University, and Michael Eric Dyson, radio host and University Professor of Sociology at Georgetown University. I must've been one of only two or three whites there in an audience of hundreds. I heard a perspective from these three prominent African-American intellectuals in front of a black audience on the current issues of our day that I had felt pretty well versed on, yet that I did not even know existed."

An African-American Boomer Learning and Development Manager speaking about the white male business executive with whom she was partnered: "Until I had the chance to hear my learning partner's story, I had never had an in-depth conversation with a white male. I realized that as much as I was providing him with new understandings of the black experience, I had my own deep misconceptions of the white male experience. I was surprised to find out that this well-respected leader had come from a tough family situation, had faced many challenges in his professional life, and even today, did not have it all figured out. I honestly did not know that white males could also struggle in life."

A white, lesbian Human Resources leader speaking about the overall learning experience: "I will never look at an HR issue the same ever again." Despite her many years of experience as a highly regarded HR professional known for her effectiveness and wisdom, her experience with her learning partner busted open new ways of looking at familiar dilemmas in addressing breakdowns between associates and their managers. Given her own personal experience as an outsider who did not come out to her coworkers until she had been at the company for ten years, her self-perception was that she really had an insider's view of diversity. "In many ways that was true, yet my African-American partner helped me see how I did not know about the black experience intimately and how it shows up in the workplace."

Initially, we worked with U.S.-based groups who were dealing with American diversity and inclusion topics. Since then, we've launched programs partnering Indian and American employees who are working on the same project. Here, in addition to using the IDI to measure the program's impact, we also looked at a handful of the operational metrics that we were already using for measuring the team's efficiency and effectiveness. In comparing the pre- and post-experience results, they were markedly better at the end the program 90 percent of the time.

The Watch Phrase

Constructively calling out differences in relationships is pivotal. Once we can manage these, we can start to be more effective in calling them out among groups and developing savvy strategies around this ability, to which we will turn our attention in Part Three.

Before we do, I realize that some of you may be wondering what happened with our *todo el mundo* party. We ended up having a blast, but it was not without its interpersonal costs. The crosscultural interpersonal lesson? "Don't do that again!" That's not to say one *can't* have a party for 100, just negotiate it up-front. Rather than starting the list at 25 and allowing it to bloat to 100, simply start at 100 or even 200, as we did a few years ago for our daughter's *quinceañera.* Yup, that's big. But this synchronous, externally-controlled, relationship-based, communal guy has found a way to make it possible for my German-American, internally-controlled, sequential, task-oriented wife to go grand. It requires willing, mutual adaptation to work.

The watch phrase for those in crosscultural relationships? Challenge me, yes. Opportunities to grow, yes. Just no surprises, please.

Thank you.

SUMMARY POINTS

- Cultural differences and worldviews can derail relationships among coworkers, friends, family, and neighbors.
- Most significant cultural differences exist below the waterline and resist the easy-to-describe differences of language, mannerisms, and other diversity descriptors.
- When encountering an unexplainable behavior that makes you feel the other party is evil, incompetent, or a moron, it's always helpful to assume positive intent. With that as your starting point, begin to navigate what lies below the waterline between what you believe and what that other person believes.
- Good intentions go a long way, particularly when it comes to the inevitable inadvertent, cultural missteps.
- Across cultures (societies, people, and geography), similar values may be expressed differently and lead to different interpretations.

SHAPING YOUR STRATEGY

- Think about relationships, offices, and locations where you have particular challenges in being able to relate to and understand your coworkers.
- What is it that's below the waterline in terms of how you and members of that group may be interpreting conflict, ability to seize opportunity, or approach to negotiation?
- What are some steps you can take to navigate the difference?
- Think of a personal relationship and apply the same principle.