

Intercultural Management Quarterly

Integrating Culture and Management in Global Organizations



Winter 2005 Edition

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Intercultural Management Quarterly (IMQ) is a publication of the Intercultural Management Institute (IMI) at American University. IMQ is a forum for experts in the field of intercultural management to share their knowledge with a broad audience interested in intercultural issues. IMQ is produced with the active involvement of faculty, graduate students and alumni of American University's School of International Service.

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From the Editor

Enhancing Our Skills

Welcome to the Winter 2005 edition of *Intercultural Management Quarterly*. We are pleased to bring you this special edition of *IMQ* released in conjunction with the Intercultural Management Institute's 6th Annual Conference, "Enhancing Cross-Cultural Effectiveness: Strategies and Skills for International Business, Education, Training and Development Professionals".

As time goes on, the relevancy and salience of IMI and *IMQ* has become more and more apparent. And this is not only in regards to the usual rhetoric of globalization and the increasingly better connected global village. As one article in this edition notes, "globalization...is misleading as it implies we are in the middle of a transformation. Sorry, the globalization train left the station a long, long time ago and has already arrived at its destination." Globalization has occurred somewhat surreptitiously and at the same time with blinding speed and far-reaching ramifications. Readers of *IMQ*, attendees of the IMI conference, and skilled interculturalists are aware that the processes of globalization are as much a part of yesterday and today as they are of tomorrow. One immense benefit of globalization is that it has given all of us a beginner's toolbox of cross-cultural skills. We are able to better understand, empathize, and communicate with other cultures than previous generations.

Yet it is now up to us to enhance these skills. It is not just about living in another culture, but about living cross-culturally. It is not just about enumerating a culture's foibles, but about understanding where its uniqueness comes from. It is not just to familiarize ourselves with cross-cultural issues, but to educate ourselves to the degree that we can advocate for heightened cross-cultural awareness and educate and train others.

This issue brings together the work of an impressive roster of individuals who are participating in the Annual Conference. All four of the conference's distinguished keynote speakers graciously donated their time and work, and articles from each of them are included in this edition of *IMQ*. Several of the conference presenters also contributed valuable and thoughtful pieces, which we hope will engender much discussion at the Conference and among the larger community of *IMQ* subscribers.

This edition features an interview with Clarence Page, touching on themes of diversity, culture, and the media. Akbar Ahmed and J. Douglas Holladay address diversity from another angle, that of religion. Their article provides a stirring example of the potentialities of interfaith communication and exchange. Also, Harriet Fulbright discusses the Fulbright scholar program and its contributions to fostering international social networks and cross-cultural communication.

Erik Granered examines the phenomenon of global call centers, and discusses the cultural factors operative in their functioning and the keys to their success. Intercultural coaching is the focus of Liliana Garcia Loeffler's article. She outlines the steps of effective coaching as well as the numerous benefits from such a regimen. And Eveline Viehboeck tackles the fascinating and highly relevant subject of the strengths and weaknesses of the cultural training given to United Nations peacekeeping forces.

Thank you for your interest in *Intercultural Management Quarterly*. I hope that you enjoy this issue of *IMQ*, and I look forward to meeting many of you at the IMI Conference in March.

Best wishes,
Adam Mendelson

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SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

Professionals, scholars and students are invited to submit articles of no less than 1,000 words and no more than 1,500 on issues related to the contemporary study and practice of intercultural management. Submissions could consider aspects of training, research and any other scholarship that relates to the area of intercultural management.

Articles must be innovative and contribute to the knowledge in this field and yet authors should avoid overly academic jargon. Footnotes or endnotes are discouraged except for direct quotes, paraphrasing or citing the research of others.

Each submission is refereed by members of the *IMQ* editorial review board and accepted pieces are subject to editing to conform with the writing style appropriate to *IMQ*.

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An Interview with Clarence Page

By Brad David and Adam Mendelson

Just after the New Year, *IMQ* Managing Editor Adam Mendelson and IMI Program Coordinator Brad David sat down with Pulitzer Prize winning journalist and IMI conference keynote speaker Clarence Page. Reproduced in part here, our conversation covered a variety of issues, topics, and current events. Yet we kept returning to the theme of diversity, the subject of Mr. Page's keynote address, "Getting the Diversity Story Right".

Mr. Page has examined diversity extensively throughout his distinguished career. He began as a journalist in 1969, and his early beats included urban journalism, police, religion, neighborhood news, and the Investigative Task Force at the *Chicago Tribune*. From this beginning, he has gone on to become a foreign correspondent in Africa, director of the Community Affairs department for WBBM-TV, assistant city editor for the *Chicago Tribune*, and has freelanced as a rock music critic. In 1996 he published his first book, *Showing My Color: Impolite Essays on Race and Identity*, a collection of essays on race, gender, and ethnic identity.

Today, Mr. Page is a nationally syndicated columnist and member of the *Chicago Tribune's* editorial board. His twice weekly columns, syndicated by about 150 newspapers, frequently deal with issues of diversity, race, culture and politics. He has further explored these subjects as an occasional panelist on "The McLaughlin Group", a contributor of essays to "Newshour with Jim Lehrer", and by hosting a number of PBS documentaries. He has also appeared on BET's "Lead Story" and NPR's "Weekend Edition Sunday".

We began our discussion by talking about diversity and the media.

IMQ: In your opinion, what is the current state of diversity in the workplace? How does the media relate to or affect this diversity?

Clarence Page: Diversity is diversity. In this country have just gotten used to in the last twenty, thirty years to having a mixture of races and religions and classes in our newsrooms and other workplaces. Today in America the workplace is about the most desegregated, diversified aspect

of our society. We go back to very separate worlds after work.

Those of us that work in the media need to be as representative of our society as we can be- of our circulation, of the people we cover. We can do a better job of covering them, we can reflect on that diversity and [then] we're not so shocked and surprised when those election results come back. And we're just one of many industries that need to be aware of that. We all need to have a real awareness of this and of how to handle it.

IMQ: You mentioned that the media's role is, as journalists, to reflect society and your constituencies. Is the media, overall, doing that?

CP: Yeah, the sanguine view is that at the top, America's media, and I think the industrialized world's media, are aware of this challenge. They have largely gotten past denial and saying, "we don't have a problem". Even in Brazil they're recognizing now, they do have a problem. And for years the Brazilians have been the most resistant that they had a problem. In Cuba, the official line is that "we don't have a problem". But Castro himself has told the party, in his speeches, that we've got a problem. Every country deals with these diversity issues in a different way.

[In America,] we're trying. And it's al-

"Today in America the workplace is about the most desegregated, diversified aspect of our society."

ways fluid too. 9/11 changed our world in so many ways. We Americans are more sophisticated just by experience, I'm happy to say. I thought after 9/11 that there would be a much worse anti-Arab backlash than we saw. I remember back in the early seventies...the anti-Arab sentiments here were fierce, including bumper stickers...and it was just awful. I think that [as a result of] experiences like that, combined with other diversity experiences we Americans have had over the last few decades, we've gotten better at it.

It was a good thing right after 9/11 that

the President held a media event with Arab and Muslim leaders surrounding him and pointing and telling everybody that these are our neighbors.

"Because of all of the conflicts that we've been through since the sixties, we've learned some things that other countries may not know."

Whether it's affirmative action or anything else, the word has to come from the top or it's not going to work. That's the way it was in the military when they just said, you know getting along with each other is just something that we all should do. But it wasn't until about '67 that after a number of mutinies and internal riots coincided with those going on in the civilian world that the Pentagon sent down the word, you will desegregate. They just made it very blatant, and then you saw change happen.

Americans are actually ahead of the game in a lot of ways. Because of all of the conflicts that we've been through since the sixties, we've learned some things that other countries may not know. At the same time, other countries have a lot to offer in terms of diversity and how they handle it that we can learn from. It kind of cuts both ways.

IMQ: In your work, you focus mainly on black/white issues in America. What are the perceptions these groups have of each other and what do you make of hip-hop becoming part of mainstream culture?

CP: After the riots [in the sixties], it became viewed as unsafe to go into black neighborhoods, even by a lot of black folks. Hip hop became, to me, kind of the pinhole view of black culture for a lot of kids coming up.

One of the things that was striking to me was a poll that [the Pittsburgh Post Dispatch] took [about 10 years ago] where they asked black folks in the Pittsburgh area, where do you get most of your impressions of white people, and the largest bloc of them said personal contact. In a similar poll, put in among Pittsburgh white

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Faith, Friendship and Peace

By Akbar Ahmed and J. Douglas Holladay

Decades back, former Sen. George Aiken from Vermont famously observed: “If we were to wake up one morning and find that we were all the same race, religion and nationality...we’d find some other reason to hate each other by noon.” How utterly prophetic and sad. Is human nature indeed that dark, seeming devoid of any true humanity? Is there an antidote to what appears to be a race toward annihilation? Is the growing divide between the West and the rest reversible? President Bush, your main challenges will be terrorism and relations with the Muslim world during your administration. We have something to offer you. By way of example, we — a Muslim and a Christian — declare a resounding “yes,” there is in fact a way forward.

Relationships are the best bridge to real understanding. Whether on the interpersonal level — between two individuals — or on the geopolitical stage — between two nations — understanding and trust grow in the rich soil of friendship. Christians and Muslims need to be encouraged to have real dialogue in their communities, especially during Ramadan, and as Osama bin Laden and al Qaeda try to threaten our societies. As our world becomes increasingly intolerant and polarized on the basis of economics, race, ethnicity, culture and, most sadly, religion, we offer an alternative.

Our suggestion is counterintuitive and starts modestly between individuals. Knowing that millions are killed regularly in the name of religion, one might conclude that we would avoid the “faith factor” at any price. Yet we instead offer a simple yet profound proposal: Look to faith and friendship as the vital bridge to establishing deep and lasting understanding. Consciously or not, the world is in search of authentic models which engender hope and where genuine faith breeds civility and trust. The relationships of which we speak don’t skirt the tough issues but take the time to establish a “bank account” of goodwill and respect. The more solid the bridge, the greater the ability to weather the tough stuff of differences. Unfortunately, at present, the airwaves add to the climate of division and mistrust by giving relentless focus to the worst in human nature. Naturally this feeds cynicism, while

compassion and understanding, formerly prized virtues, are now viewed with contempt and considered “soft” and irrelevant.

The two of us, one from the Muslim tradition, the other Christian, met shortly after September 11 at the National Press Club in Washington. Each was in search of a “soulmate” to explore, in a climate of growing suspicions and brewing hostility, a way to avoid what Harvard’s Samuel Huntington saw as the inevitable clash of civilizations. While both of us enjoy politics, we prize faith much more. Thus began an unusual journey together.

A decision was taken to meet regularly to better understand our faith traditions and their effects upon our beliefs and behavior. As the trust, understanding and respect grew, we expanded our regular conversation to include others similarly inclined — ambassadors, CEOs, policy-makers, senators, even a few media types and generals. Our objective was really quite simple: to create a safe table around which all could express their views and where we could learn to live with our differences. In many parts of the world today, people are killing over differences. We decided instead to delight in them, concluding that on this small planet, a sustainable model of hope and civility might serve as a light in the midst of so much darkness. Such models must celebrate candor and free expression in the context of trust and openness.

What we are learning is profound in its simplicity. We are all more alike than different. Caring and attempting to understand another’s faith journey and perspective are not compromises but rather love in action. Taking time to be friends is an investment, yet it establishes a climate to challenge and ultimately modify one’s set views and those of others. It is humbling to enter into another’s life and worldview. It is far easier to demonize and make caricatures of those who differ from ourselves.

While the focus on our initiative has been deeply personal, one interesting theological bridge has been the person of Jesus. While one of us reveres Him as the Lord and Savior of the world, the other holds him as a highly revered and loved revelation of God as was the prophet Muhammad. We are working hard to convince one another

of the veracity of our views. Differences need not be a threat to another. Mutual understanding in an increasingly violent world needs to be rediscovered.

Must the war on terror be won? Absolutely. Yet the antidote to the prophets of violence is not only to use force but to construct bridges. Simple friendship just might be the “real” ticket.

Akbar S. Ahmed holds the Ibn Khaldun Chair of Islamic Studies at American University. J. Douglas Holladay is a partner at Park Avenue Equity Partners. This article first appeared in the November 15, 2004 Washington Times.

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Fulbright: His Legacy and Its Relevance Today

By Harriet Fulbright

Senator J. William Fulbright spent thirty years in the U.S Senate as a representative of the state of Arkansas, and he served his home state well, initiating and supporting legislation to promote its industries and agriculture and to develop such recreational assets as the White River. The program for which he is most famous, however, is the Fulbright Program for international education exchange, which was established right after the end of World War II out of Senator Fulbright's deep concern about the long-term effects of the atomic bombs dropped on Nagasaki and Hiroshima. What he learned about their long term effects was so horrifying that the prevention of World War III became his primary focus, and after reviewing his own experience as a Rhodes scholar, he became convinced that if future potential leaders of each country could be sent to live in another culture to interact with its people, they might be more inclined as adults to exchange ideas instead of bullets.

The program he established early on which bears his name has encouraged more than a quarter of a million scholars to go abroad and expand their minds in like manner, and it has been such a force for understanding in the world that in every country I visit there are Fulbright scholars who declare that it transformed their lives. For all its power, it has never been a drain on the US economy. In fact, in the more than 50 years since its beginning, it has cost the US taxpayer less than 4 days of the Defense Department at present spending levels. Participating countries all over the world are now contributing either in kind or in cash, to the program, some more than the United States, and over fifty of them share responsibility for running it through bi-national commissions composed of equal numbers of Americans and host country citizens. Much of the loyalty to Fulbright comes from this fact - that it is a program guided by all those involved. There is an ownership around the world which generates a special pride.

The Fulbright Program not only transforms individual lives but helps to form global networks that in turn change the very nature of foreign policy, of the con-

duct of international business and politics, of human relations between people of differing cultures. Recent events prove that even the most powerful cannot "go it alone," and that furthermore, understanding is the basic requirement for successful collaborative activity - an understanding of the values and attitudes of the potential collaborators.

This is all very well, some say, but in this age of mass communication, why do we need to take the time and money to move people across borders to accomplish this? The first and most obvious answer is that communication - visual and verbal - has passed through the filter of the producer. Seeing and hearing through the eyes and ears of another is learning one point of view. It is the difference between looking through a keyhole and walking through an open door for the whole view.

An equally important reason for international education exchange is the building of "social capital", or social networks, norms of reciprocity, mutual assistance and trustworthiness. Social networks have real value both for the people in those networks as well as for bystanders. Criminologists, for instance, have shown that the crime rate in a neighborhood is lowered when neighbors know one another well, benefiting even the residents who are not themselves involved in neighborhood activities. The bridging type of social capital, or connections which include different types of people who are outward-looking creates a much better understanding between peoples of differing cultures. It takes more work to establish and expand, but in this era of a shrinking world, of weapons of mass destruction and indescribable hatred fueling the actions of some groups, it is ever more important for our wellbeing - important for reasons beyond the recent terrorist activities.

This question is important because peace is not simply the absence of hostilities and killing, nor is it a warm and fuzzy feeling or "a tranquil state of felicity and blessedness." Rather it is the constant struggle of energetic human beings to settle their endless conflicts through consensus or compromise. It is the willingness of a body politic to create a legal sys-

tem based on justice for all and abide by it even during those times when it seems to fall short of its mission.

As we move relentlessly toward an ever more interdependent world, extreme nationalism and dogmatic ideology become luxuries that the human race can no longer afford. It must turn its energies now to the politics of survival. If we do so, we may find in time that we can do better than just survive. We may find that the simple human preference for life and peace has an inspirational force of its own, less intoxicating perhaps than the sacred abstractions of nation and ideology, but far more relevant to the requirements of human life and human happiness.

We must generate expectancies of peace as powerful and self-generating as the expectancy of war. We must learn to deal with our adversaries in terms of the *needs* and *hopes* of both sides rather than the demands of one side upon the other. We must remove stridency and bad manners from our diplomacy, because the language of the ultimatum is the language of conflict, because there is no way more certain to turn tension into open conflict than to strike at an adversary's pride and self-respect.

These thoughts are not only the guidelines Senator Fulbright used to forge foreign policy. They are also what propelled him to establish the program for international educational exchange that bears his name. It has brought more than a quarter of a million people both to this country and from here to over 140 countries around the world. Thanks to the enthusiastic support of its alumni, it has succeeded beyond his wildest hopes and dreams. Fulbright scholars have over the years formed networks across national boundaries and scholarly disciplines; they have reached out as human beings in collaborative enterprises, scholarly research, conferences and just plain wide-ranging conversations. They have connected with other human beings of very different cultures and backgrounds and have found the experience enriching, exhilarating and beneficial to a far wider circle, thanks to the ripple effect of human interaction.

Finally, from a fascinating book I read

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Global Call Center Management: Extending Corporate Culture Across Cultures and Time Zones

By Erik Granered

With the global services revolution now essentially behind us, corporations are forced to take advantage of global talent in order to remain competitive. Managing outsourced call center operations requires particular attention, as creating a successful customer experience across cultures, while challenging, represents the only option for retaining customers and protecting a corporate image. The answer lies in careful decision-making and ongoing program management that consider culture as a competitive advantage.

Call Centers and the Global Services Revolution

Outsourcing is a sensitive topic these days. The media has managed to lump a whole collection of socio-economic trends under this one threatening term – *outsourcing*. But is it not ironic that we respond negatively to the Indian call center agent who interrupts our dinner when the telephone we use to answer the call was made in China 12 years ago? The difference, of course, is that customer service outsourcing puts us in direct contact with the overseas worker. Enabled by dramatically reduced data transmission rates, any white-collar job can be performed remotely by qualified workers, often at a tenth of the labor cost.

We sometimes hear this trend referred to as *globalization*, but this term is misleading as it implies we are in the middle of a transformation. Sorry, the globalization train left the station a long, long time ago and has already arrived at its destination. We all exist in an environment that is already considered “global.” The outsourcing that we associate with call centers should more accurately be referred to as “global services outsourcing” as customer service functions only make up a part of the trend.

All cross-border operations benefit from cultural literacy. In outsourcing software development, for example, a software developer in the Netherlands may have to learn to listen for more subtle delivery of negative feedback from his Indian colleagues than he might get from his local

colleagues. Nowhere is the need for cultural sophistication greater than in the world of call centers, however, where technology is enabling cross-cultural interaction on a scale that would have been inconceivable even just a few years ago.

Global Customer Service Strategies

It is perhaps not fair to say that every vice president of customer service needs to be an expert on world cultures. The most important thing managers with decision-making authority should know is that culture is a major competitive variable. In deciding on the location for a new call center, the informed executive collects large amounts of information such as labor availability, labor cost, telecommunications infrastructure, education, and infrastructure availability. It may seem obvious that culture should be included as one of those variables; however, many companies have been slow to learn that setting up outsourced customer service operations is not as easy as just reducing the accent of an agent.

“Accent neutralization,” as it is called, is indeed helpful as it teaches the agent to slow down and speak more like the customer, but it should never be assumed that we can fool the customer into thinking the agent is a native speaker. It is also true that while most consumers around the world are open to being exposed to different accents, a few are less receptive. Online consumer message boards are full of complaints related to having to speak with “foreigners.” Entire operations have had to be reversed as a result, the most well known being the decision by Dell Computer Corporation to pull its business support from a call center in India.

Purely from the point of view of technology and labor availability, a call center could be located nearly anywhere these days. But call center executives can’t afford to ignore how their customers perceive foreign accents. It may be a sad admission, but we harbor qualitative opinions regarding the accents we encounter — some are found to be pleasing, others not so. Americans sometime perceive an

Indian accent as “talking over” them, suggesting a perceived hierarchical difference unlike British customers who tend not to hear the same thing. American customers generally react less negatively to Spanish accents. It appears the common thread is the more familiar we are with an accent, the less likely that we will react negatively. For most companies there is no room for missing the opportunity to create a positive customer experience. One negative experience could be enough to lose a customer forever. And what at first might have seemed an easy way to save money for a company could quickly become a public relations disaster.

Creating Customer Experience

The recipe for success may appear as simple as the recipe for disaster, at least on the conceptual level. It should come as no surprise that the key to success in global call center management is allowing talented people to have enough time and resources to do it right. Executives should not assign rookies to do this work, but rather assign a team to come up with a plan and present alternatives to that plan. As part of this process, ask difficult questions about vendor control, agent training, agent retention, and expected customer reactions. All these variables and more can be considered up front and dealt with in an informed manner. The rewards for properly managed customer service outsourcing are now even more compelling, as some successful operations indeed achieve improved customer satisfaction and lower employee turnover. Such solutions can become anchors in your operation rather than low-cost afterthoughts.

It takes a month or two to train an agent in India or the Philippines to start taking calls. Beyond the accent neutralization, agents have to learn to understand the version of English they will hear. This is important as all world languages vary greatly from one location to another. There is cultural training as well. It is helpful to learn about tendencies in problem solving and how individuals from the customer culture handle confrontation. For example,

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Call Center...

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Americans can be very focused on time and tasks, which can be viewed as being pushy from the perspective of many other cultures. One way to diffuse pushiness is for the agent to lend some extra urgency to the situation. This demonstrates to the American customer that the agent has fully heard and understood the situation.

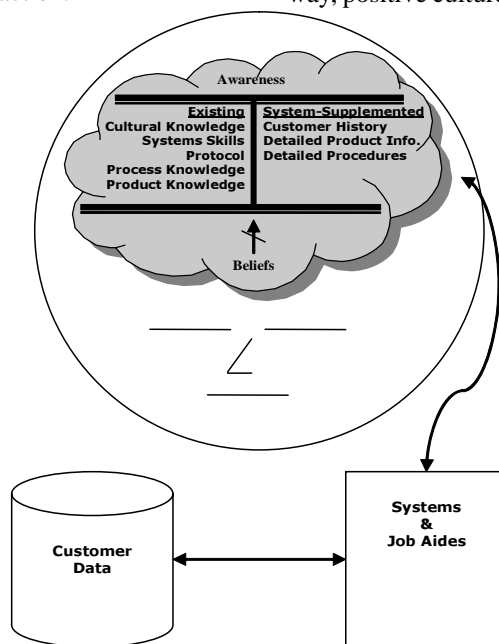
Just as countries and organizations have culture, so too do call centers have a unique culture. Make no mistake about it — call centers develop common belief systems just like any other organization does. The challenge for the global call center manager is to employ management strategies that not only resonate with the employees, but also create a customer experience that is acceptable if not extraordinary. Management practices are notorious for being difficult to transplant from one culture to another. American call centers often feature motivational banners, a bell or a gong that is rung when targets are met. One might see the cubicle of a star performer decorated with balloons, teddy bears, and awards. Such motivational strategies will not work in many other places around the globe. Many Europeans would find these rewards somewhat childish and some Asian cultures might find the emphasis on individual rewards downright embarrassing.

The first key to global call center management lies in focusing on achieving the universal definition of good customer service culture — *customer service culture is the shared belief that serving customers is important*. One must deploy local management strategies to create such a shared belief, but one will never be able to create a customer experience across cultural distances without also creating cross-cultural self-awareness and an appreciation for the customer's culture as it relates to service. In the call center, organizational culture is open for all to see as the calls pour in. Agent motivation is reflected in agent communication. The equation gets even a little more complex when we consider that the call center is often the main interaction between a corporation and the consumer. In summary, the ability to extend corporate culture to a distant, outsourced location depends on a care-

fully considered program to train agents and manage vendors.

The following illustration depicts the complex mix of resources an agent must draw upon in a cross-cultural customer service setting. The first step is creating a high level of awareness through training. This awareness includes product knowledge, systems knowledge, customer service skills, as well as how the ticketing and customer relationship management system supplements awareness about the customer. In addition, however, the most important awareness the agent must have is the awareness of his own beliefs and how they might interfere with customer interaction. Agents must be aware of how we judge situations through our beliefs and how reactions to such judgments can damage the interaction.

the anti-globalization movement understands, not taking advantage of globally available human talent is simply not sustainable. The shifts in labor allocation that occur as a result of global services outsourcing are painful and real for individuals and communities, but they are not a zero-sum game in which one job substitutes neatly for another. As it stands, many corporations are operating in stealth mode, hush-hushing and tiptoeing around difficult social issues, managing public perception while the global services economy is in full motion. But it does not have to be this way. The sophisticated corporation understands its role as a global citizen and cascades compassionate values that are congruent in word and deed. In this way, positive culture and communication



Corporate Schizophrenia

Extending a corporate brand and reputation across the globe is clearly challenging. Realizing the importance of brand and reputation, companies have created public relations departments, which are different from their marketing departments, both of which exist in a vacuum from the more operational divisions that are out there actually setting up the global infrastructure. In fact, call centers are equally if not more important as these internal departments as they are the ones actually talking to customers.

For executives and corporations the dilemma persists. Using language that

penetrate the corporate fabric to create tangible competitive advantage, extending the corporate brand across cultures and time zones.

Erik Granered is author of Global Call Centers: Achieving Outstanding Customer Service Across Borders & Time Zones, recently published by Nicholas Brealey International. The book delivers a back-to-basics message with emphasis on human communication and cross-cultural agent skills.

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Intercultural Coaching for Global Managers: Beyond Cultural Awareness to Integration

By Liliana Garcia Loeffler

A key element in global managers' success is their ability to understand other cultures and communicate effectively with their overseas constituents. What is the most effective way of achieving cross-cultural competence? I invite you to consider an approach beyond traditional intercultural training.

To begin let's think about culture. The renowned anthropologist Edward T. Hall likened culture to a silent language: the elaborate patterns of behaviors that rule just about every aspect of interactions we have with another human being, from how we frame our conversations, to our handling of time, our spatial relationships, and our concept of status, to name a few. To complicate matters, this other language we call culture is not easily apparent even though we use it every day. As Hall observed, "Culture hides more than it reveals, and what it hides it does so from its own people" (*The Silent Language*, 1959).

Today, multinational companies offer intercultural training for their executives. Typically, these global managers spend 1-2 days covering a myriad of culture-related topics. The focus is on the distinctions between their cultural values and behaviors, and those of their counterparts across the Pacific, the Atlantic, in the Americas, or even in other regions of their own country. The benefit of these programs, in my view, is that they raise cross-cultural awareness, which is realistically what can be accomplished in the allotted time. However, is training alone sufficient to meet the requirements of increasingly complex global interactions?

Research on the effectiveness of training reveals that 4-6 weeks after training nearly 80% of what was covered in the session is forgotten, unless there is a mechanism to support and facilitate the habituation of the proposed learning. If the desired skill is not practiced and applied, sustained learning will not occur. This is similar to the process of learning a new dance or sport, or learning to play a musical instrument. Mastering any of these new skills requires a process of first

learning the mechanics of the tool being used, aligning our bodies and brains accordingly, and practicing until the desired new skill is internalized and it becomes second nature. Brain theorists refer to this as creating new wiring. For global managers to be most effective in intercultural communications, they need to internalize cross-cultural communication skills.

Beyond Intercultural Training

I propose that we go beyond creating awareness of intercultural distinctions, to internalizing the differences both intellectually and emotionally via intercultural coaching. This new wiring of cross-cultural communication skills allows the executive to focus his/her energy on the business at hand, and liberates his/her mind from the confusion caused by miscommunication due to intercultural differences.

Perhaps a more effective approach is a phase process that focuses on empowering the executive to gain cross-cultural competence, the highest level of intercultural sensitivity, through one-on-one coaching sessions. The executive expands his/her range of thinking and communicating in order to become aligned with the culture(s) important to the executive.

Milton J. Bennett developed a framework for understanding the process of increasing cross-cultural competence. In his Model for Intercultural Sensitivity, Bennett's underlying assumption is that as "one's experience of cultural differences becomes more sophisticated, one's competence in intercultural relations increases. At the higher levels of cultural competence the individual has an expanded worldview, is able to look at the world through different eyes, and he/she is able to intentionally change behavior to communicate more effectively in another culture" (*The Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity*, 1993).

To achieve higher levels of cultural sensitivity, it is critical that the executive have cultural self-awareness. This is key because it reminds the executive that: (a) what he/she perceives in interactions with

someone from another culture is subjective and distinct because of the cultural lenses he/she is using; and (b) his/her and the other person's realities differ because they are both interpreting their interactions through different lenses. Unless there is awareness of this cross-cultural exchange by at least one of the parties, the communication is highly susceptible to misunderstanding and the associated tangling of emotions. Higher levels of cultural sensitivity can be achieved through a two phase process with the aid of a coach.

Phase I supports the executive's process of self-awareness as well as his/her understanding of cross-cultural dimensions and the forces that shape cultures, such as: history, environment, political and technological factors. This is a 2-day session that the coach customizes for the executive based on an in-person or phone conversation to assess the executive's situation and needs. Because this is the beginning of the coaching engagement, it is important here for the coach to begin building trust and rapport with the executive, in preparation for Phase II of the engagement.

In Phase II of the engagement coaching begins. In weekly sessions over 4 months or longer, the focus is on facilitating the executive's learning process of building or expanding global communication skills. The coach and the executive explore his/her major intercultural barriers or issues; and the cultural filters, behaviors, thinking and communication styles inherent in the executive's culture, and those of the culture(s) important to the executive's business objectives.

With the coach's support, the executive begins to develop the necessary mental muscle by practicing other manners of presenting information, thinking, etc. The executive begins to internalize these new skills by applying them as needed on-the-job. Over time, he/she learns to communicate so well in the silent language, that cultural differences become nearly imperceptible to his/her audience. The executive may begin to walk in the other person's

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Intercultural Coaching...

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cultural shoes. Even better, both parties may partake in the dance of communication beautifully!

With this specialized coaching and with practice, the global executive can become so culturally competent, that, for example:

- When in Rio, an executive with a linear (or monochronic) working style can feel at ease working in a multi-tasking (or polychronic) working environment, or vice versa.

- When in Tokyo, the global manager who usually speaks and presents specific information first (in an inductive style), is able to switch to speaking or presenting the big picture first (in a deductive manner), according to the cultural orientation of his audience.

- While in New York City, the global team member from hierarchical Bogotá, who is conditioned to defer to his supervisor during team presentations, develops confidence and feels comfortable participating and voicing his opinion in global team meetings.

- An executive from a relatively individualistic cultural orientation knows the expectations of working in a group-oriented culture, and is able to quickly switch to a different working style.

- And a leader who has been conditioned to think with in terms of “one size fits all” (or universalistic) mentality is able to see the perspective of a particularistic culture and successfully lead a global team.

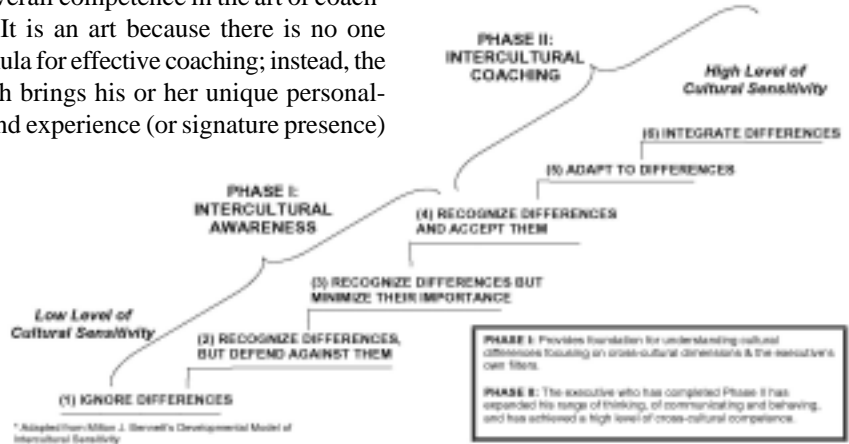
Transformational coaching of any nature happens incrementally over time simply because real learning or new wiring needs to be internalized via practicing or habituation so that it can be retrieved from our brain “just-in-time”.

Phase I of this program takes the executive through stages 1-3 and the early part of stage 4 of Bennett’s model. In Phase II the executive completes stage 4 is coached through stages 5-6, through Integration of cultural differences.

Requirements of Intercultural Coaches

Excellent intercultural coaches have attained education and proficiency in the coaching and intercultural fields; they have lived and worked in multicultural business environments, and learn continu-

ously. As in other forms of coaching, effective intercultural coaching requires certain qualities and fundamental skills of the coach: self-awareness in the personal and cultural dimensions; empathy, lightness, excellent listening and observation skills; the facility to ask powerful questions and an overall competence in the art of coaching. It is an art because there is no one formula for effective coaching; instead, the coach brings his or her unique personality and experience (or signature presence)



to the coaching engagement. The coach has the ability to become nearly invisible in the coaching dialogue as the executive directs the energy to where he or she needs to be in that moment. An excellent coach also has the facility to co-create a safe and enriching relationship built on a foundation of mutual trust and respect, so that the executive feels empowered and accountable to reach his/her most important and desired goals. In the case of our global manager, he/she cannot help but become a member of a larger world beyond that of his/her own native country.

What is the benefit of Intercultural Coaching to the global manager and to the company?

Minimally, the investment in this two-phase approach will empower the executive to have more confidence in leading and working with people from other cultures. Breakdowns in the flow of team projects caused by miscommunication across cultures will be minimized. Best practices from other cultures will be embraced more quickly; effectiveness of multicultural teams will be enhanced; and the synergy of different approaches will allow the executive to take the organization to a new level.

I ask the global manager—what is the business impact of successful communication with your international constituents?

Executives and global organizations today have an opportunity to create a more effective way to communicate across cultures and thereby become more successful at achieving important business objectives. They can maintain the status quo, or they can create a new context for global

managers and their team-members, a context that enables both sides to have an ease of communicating that flows back and forth with mutual respect and understanding, so that executives can focus their mental energy on the business at hand.

With intercultural coaching, the coach supports the global manager in the process of learning to expand his/her range of thinking, communicating and behaving in order to achieve cross-cultural competence with ease. This learning empowers the global manager to become a highly effective global leader, capable of formulating and implementing a business strategy in any cultural context.

Liliana Garcia Loeffler is an intercultural and executive coach trained at New York University's certificate program in Organizational and Executive Coaching. She is a member of the International Coaching Federation (ICF) and the Society for Intercultural Training and Development (SIETAR). She resides in New Jersey and can be contacted at lgloeffler@gmail.com.

Note: The term “signature presence”, used in this article, can be found previously in Mary Beth O’Neill’s *Executive Coaching with Backbone and Heart*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000.

Cultural Awareness Training for United Nations Peacekeepers

By *Eveline Viehboeck*

Peacekeepers are engaged worldwide in peace operations. The United Nations currently conducts 16 peacekeeping operations, located in Africa (7), the Middle East (3), Europe (3), Asia (2) and the Americas (1). According to United Nations reports for November 2004, 63,909 military personnel and civilian police officers served in peacekeeping missions, followed by 3,983 international and 7,418 local civilian personnel. One hundred and three countries have contributed staff to these operations.

I will discuss peacekeeping training program for cultural awareness developed by the United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO). It will be argued that, despite the use of relevant concepts of culture, time constraints and weak methodologies reduce the impact of the training programme.

Peacekeeping operations are by definition a multicultural affair. DPKO estimates that since 1948 up to one million soldiers, police officers and civilians have served in peacekeeping missions, contributed to by close to 130 countries. The contributing countries have to prepare and train their personnel for peacekeeping assignments.

To assist in this process, DPKO has developed standardized generic training modules. The training package contains a total of 23 modules, ranging from information about the United Nations system and peacekeeping operations to stress management, cultural awareness, personnel security, human rights, media relations, logistics, medical, and others. DPKO published the modules in 2003, which are available on the Internet under www.un.org/Depts/dpko/training.

Module number 5b is titled "Cultural Awareness". The introduction of the module states that the role of culture in peacekeeping operations has long been underestimated. The subject of culture is seen as a sensitive topic and it is essential that peacekeepers understand cultural differences and prevent misunderstandings.

The module describes the aim of cultural awareness training with providing

United Nations peacekeepers with information necessary to improve their ability to work and live in multi-cultural environments. As a result of cultural awareness training, peacekeepers should be familiar with various concepts of culture and know how to work effectively in a multicultural environment. The duration of the training is scheduled for 90 minutes, of which 60 minutes are reserved for presentations, followed by 30 minutes of case study discussion. National instructors are advised to allocate more time for cultural awareness training if necessary.

The module includes a definition of culture described as a shared system of meanings, beliefs, values, and behaviours through which experience is interpreted and carried out. It mentions that culture is acquired through the process of socialization and is experienced on an observable level (e.g. clothing, language and food) and as shared ideas, beliefs and values. Culture is collective, relative and changing and involves a complex response process. It is shaped by various factors and attached to it is the danger of acting on the basis of stereotypes, prejudices, and ethno-centric positions.

The module describes further cross-cultural encounters in peacekeeping operations as occurring in various contexts, e.g. involving different national contingents, military and civilian cooperation, interactions of international staff with local communities and with groups of ethnic conflict.

The module then provides examples of cultural differences. It mentions global differences in eating habits, religion, family, gender, language, gestures, dress code, traffic, and time. In order to build cultural awareness, trainees are advised to develop first an understanding of their own culture, followed by an understanding of other cultures.

To prepare for peacekeeping assignments, trainees are then asked to collect country-specific information. They are also informed that culture shock might occur as part of an adaptation process. Trainees are further reminded that cultural

knowledge and understanding are essential for maintaining good relationships in a peacekeeping mission.

Finally, the module mentions differences in organizational cultures and advises trainees to understand the various organizational cultures involved in United Nations peacekeeping. The model concludes by providing case studies for the marketplace, the toilet experience, hand in hand walking, movement control at the airport, and gifts.

What are the strengths and what are the weaknesses of the peacekeeping training module for cultural awareness?

Overall, it is encouraging to see that the peacekeeping training program addresses the issue of culture. The module mentions the importance of culture and points out its relevance for peacekeeping operations. A further positive is the use of inclusive definitions of culture in the module, referring to the objective and subjective notions of culture. The module also mentions the danger of stereotypes and ethnocentrism. Additionally, trainees are informed that not only nations but also organizations have their own cultures.

The training module's weakness has to do with its practical implementation. First, the timeframe is too narrow to be effective. 60 minutes of lecture and 30 minutes of group discussion are insufficient to prepare peacekeepers for challenging intercultural tasks. National instructors, on the other hand, are invited to allocate more training time if necessary. But it is doubtful that the pressure emerging from 22 additional training modules will allow for it.

Second, the culture-general approach used in the module is too vague to be relevant in particular peacekeeping settings. For example, statements like Asians use chop sticks and Europeans knife and fork are not useful to prepare Pakistani peacekeepers for an assignment in the Republic of Congo. Considering the large amount of personnel trained in peacekeeping, it is understandable that DPKO employs standardized training procedures. And standardized training seems to work well when the goal is the

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Peacekeepers...

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provision of factual, technical information. The use of standardized training, however, might fail when the objective is to sensitize peacekeepers in recognizing individual cultural patterns and to develop mindfulness and specific intercultural skills. Effective intercultural training for peacekeepers also needs to be peacekeeping mission specific and should include training methodologies beyond the level of upfront instruction.

Finally, it appears that the scope of the cultural awareness training module is too ambitious. The module aims to cover national cultural differences *and* organizational cultural differences in one attempt. Considering the limited time available, it is doubtful whether this can be achieved. I believe that the designers of the training module were aware of the dilemma. Why otherwise would they have called the module "Cultural Awareness" and not "Intercultural Competence"?

In summary, the effort to develop a module for cultural awareness training for United Nations peacekeeping is laudable and necessary. The DPKO training module provides useful information about cultures and cultural differences but shows methodological weakness when it comes to preparing peacekeepers for country-specific operations.

Dr. Eveline Viehboeck is an intercultural lecturer at the University for Applied Sciences at Wiener Neustadt, Austria. Prior to this, she was a Program Officer at the United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations in New York.

Fulbright...

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recently called "The Ingenuity Gap," I would like to leave with you a piece of its thesis. Thomas Homer-Dixon writes that there are two kinds of ingenuity: *technical* and *social*. It is clear that we have made incredible progress technologically, but we have been less successful in the social arena. One of the biggest problems we face is that we tend to focus on solving problems that we create rather than trying to use our ingenuity to prevent the problems that plague us.

The Fulbright Program is designed to prevent problems – to create empathy and a greater understanding between peoples with different ways of looking at the world and its communities. Collaborative activity as a result of that understanding provides the building blocks for the road toward lasting peace.

Harriet Fulbright has spent the majority of her adult life in the fields of education and the arts. After leaving the President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities as its Executive Director under President Clinton, she tours the world speaking on such issues as leadership, international education exchange, citizen diplomacy, and the importance of the arts as a basic element in education. This article was adapted from a speech given at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio.

Clarence Page...

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people asking where do you get most of your contact with black people, and most of them said the media. There's a lot of difference. Black folks are more likely to have personal contact with white people than white people are with black people. And for them to say that they get it through the media, at that time it means that to most white people in Pittsburgh, black people are either the Cosbys or Snoop Doggy Dogg. Because that's what the media shows us as; you don't see anything in between, except the occasional black newscaster.

So hip hop to me kind of performs that role. Among other things, it is a way of expressing a street expression. That's where the blues came from, where jazz came from, and to me, it's a modern version of that.

Brad David is a program coordinator at IMI. He just completed his Master's degree in International Affairs in the School of International Service at American University.

Adam Mendelson is a Master's candidate in International Peace and Conflict Resolution at American University with a focus on the Middle East.

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