

**Diversity at Work: The Practice of Inclusion****Bernardo M. Ferdman, Editor****Barbara Deane, Associate Editor****Professional Practice Series****Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology****Wiley/Jossey-Bass, 2014. pp. 155 - 176****Intercultural Competence: Vital Perspectives for Diversity and Inclusion****by Janet M. Bennett**

Being “global souls”—seeing ourselves as members of a world community (Iyer, 2000), knowing that we share the future with others—requires powerful intercultural competence. Being effective domestically—seeking social justice, assuring privilege is shared—requires equally complicated skills. Such competence embraces the paradox of globalization and seeks to reconcile the competing commitments to self and others, with the knowledge that this reconciliation is profoundly difficult. It is grounded in the certainty that we cannot neglect either side of the equation, domestic or international.

The field of intercultural relations has evolved in the context of this demanding paradox. How can we address the vitality of globalization and yet resolve the domestic concerns we share? As we do so, how can we develop in ourselves the necessary mastery and concomitant humility required to be effective across cultures? And what is required to integrate an intercultural perspective with diversity and inclusion?

**DEFINITIONS**

As we develop this careful linkage between the world of intercultural and the world of diversity and inclusion, definitions become all-important. *Culture*, as described here, refers to the learned and shared values, beliefs, and behaviors of a community of interacting people. In other words, members of a culture are likely to influence an

individual's behavior when that person spends enough time interacting with them. Culture is dynamic, not static, and there are wide contextual variations within each group. These variations are enriched through communication. As Barnlund (1989) so aptly noted, "It is through communication that we acquire culture; it is in our manner of communicating that we display our cultural uniqueness" (p. xiv). The traditional definition of culture allows us to consider many of the well-known groups defined in diversity work as cultures, including those based on nationality, ethnicity, gender, age, disability, sexual orientation, economic status, education, profession, religion, organization, and any other differences learned and shared by a group of interacting people. As we use this inclusive definition of culture, it is vital to recognize that ". . . culture is not a single variable but rather comprises multiple variables, affecting all aspects of experience. . . . Culture is a process through which ordinary activities and conditions take on an emotional tone and a moral meaning for participants. . . . Cultural processes frequently differ within the same ethnic or social group because of differences in age cohort, gender, political association, class, religion, ethnicity, and even personality" (Kleinman & Benson, 2006, p. 3).

To the degree that each of these memberships are a part of an individual's identity, they comprise the multicultural self, that multi-layered set of influences that intersect in complicated ways and relate importantly to who we are and to how others see us. Respect for the complexity of cultural identities is a prerequisite for understanding culturally influenced patterns of interaction. Further, it provides ". . . the key to comprehending the juncture between global and domestic diversity. Although some people have histories that are far more extensive than others, and although some people

carry unequal burdens of oppression or perquisites of privilege, they are all equal (but different) in the complexity of their cultural worldviews” (Bennett & Bennett, 2004, p. 150).

To a significant degree, this recognition of shared complexity can foster a mutual respect that opens dialogue between diversity and intercultural relations.

### **INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE**

This chapter explores the notion that mastery of intercultural competence is equally relevant to both domestic and global contexts, providing a durable foundation for interaction across cultures. While diversity professionals may emphasize recruitment, intercultural skills enhance the likelihood of better hiring interviews. For instance, some suggest that diversity and inclusion in the United States traces its history back to the domestic civil rights movement, while intercultural competence evolved through the global side of organizations. Many note that these two essential dialogues are rarely integrated into initiatives. This chapter suggests they should be. While I approach this topic primarily from the approaches that U.S. Americans take to cultural difference, the intent is that these approaches noted above must incorporate intercultural competence.

As the Executive Director of the Intercultural Communication Institute, I work both globally and locally, teaching and training about intercultural competence. My education and professional experience in academic institutions, corporations, and government reinforces the idea that domestic inclusion and globalization will be built on effective interaction across cultures.

This bridge between inclusion and intercultural perspectives can best be built through a focus on intercultural competence, referring to the cognitive, affective, and

behavioral skills and characteristics that support appropriate and effective interaction in a variety of cultural contexts. These attributes and abilities are often referred to as the “head, heart, and hand components” (see Hayles, this volume), or as a mindset, heartset, and skillset (Bennett, 2009b). This definition is the basis of the intercultural knowledge and competence rubric for assessing learning outcomes by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (J. M. Bennett, as cited in Rhodes, 2010).

Kleinman and Benson (2006) imply that sometimes those who teach cultural competence hold the view that “culture can be reduced to a technical skill” (p. 3). Rather, we need to educate ourselves and others to explore the complexity of cultural influences openly.

In recognition of the significant role that intercultural competence plays in global interchange, Deardorff (2009) has edited a collection of articles that explore the concept in a wide range of cultures and professional contexts, including a comprehensive overview by Spitzberg and Changnon (2009) of various competencies and the more widely recognized models that have been explored in the literature. Whether it is called “intercultural effectiveness” (Vulpe, Kealey, Protheroe, & MacDonald, 2001); “cultural intelligence” (Earley & Ang, 2003; Peterson, 2004; Thomas & Inkson, 2004); “global competence” (Bird & Osland, 2004; Hunter, White, & Godbey, 2006); “intercultural communication competence” (Byram, 2012; Collier, 1989; Dinges & Baldwin, 1996; Hammer, 1989; Kim, 1991; Spitzberg, 1994; Wiseman, 2002); “culture learning” (Paige, Cohen, Kappler, Chi, & Lassegard, 2002) or “intercultural competence,” (Lustig & Koester, 2009), there is a fair consensus that we are describing the capacity to interact effectively and appropriately across cultures. This suggests that shared meaning emerges

(effective) with little or no offense (appropriate).

Inherently interdisciplinary, the academic exploration of intercultural competence spans sociology, business, linguistics, intercultural communication, counseling, social work, cultural geography, anthropology, and education. Various professional contexts promote intercultural competence to facilitate global leadership in the corporate world, culturally responsive teaching and learning at all levels of education, provision of culturally competent healthcare, development of culturally sensitive customer service, and even culturally appropriate tourism. Addressing the current focus on intercultural competence, there are dozens of assessment instruments that have been designed to measure knowledge, skills, and attitudes for needs assessment, coaching, program design, selection, and professional development (Intercultural Communication Institute, 2011).

Among the many competencies we associate with being effective across cultures, cultural self-awareness is the key cognitive competency, curiosity is the key affective competency, and empathy is the key behavioral competency. We will consider each of these in more depth.

### **COGNITIVE COMPETENCIES**

*Cultural self-awareness* refers to our recognition of the cultural patterns that have influenced our identities and that are reflected in the various culture groups to which we belong, always acknowledging the dynamic nature of both culture and identity. This self-awareness of who we are culturally is a prerequisite for the development of intercultural sensitivity (Bennett, 2009a). Until I know that I am a multicultural person, with aspects of my identity influenced situationally by various cultures, I am less likely to understand why you are not just an inferior version of me. If I do not see you as a multicultural

person, with an identity possibly influenced situationally by the cultural groups you belong to, I may observe that you do things differently; since I do them well, I may be left with the conclusion I am superior. It is this blinding filter that interferes with development of intercultural competence.

Other key cognitive competencies include knowledge of other cultures, of culture-general frameworks, and of culture-specific information. Culture-general frameworks refer to the patterns that may be used to explore any other cultures; culture-specific information focuses on the patterns that may exist in any one culture in which we are interested.

Knowledge of other cultures is a well-substantiated mediating influence in reducing prejudice and stereotypes but, interestingly enough, not necessarily the most effective way to counteract all the biases that we have been taught (Pettigrew, 2008; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2011). Pettigrew's meta-analytic research (2008) thoroughly explores numerous studies on how new knowledge of other culture groups affects attitudes and he concludes that "Early theorists thought that intergroup contact led to learning about the outgroup, and this new knowledge in turn reduced prejudice. Recent work, however, reveals that this knowledge mediation does exist but is of minor importance. Empathy and perspective taking are far more important" (p. 190).

### **AFFECTIVE COMPETENCIES**

In the affective dimension, *curiosity* is often cited as the keystone of intercultural competence (Deardorff, 2006; Gregersen, Morrison, & Black, 1998; Mendenhall, 2001). Opdal (2001) describes curiosity as a sense of wonder, ". . . the state of mind that signals we have reached the limits of our present understanding, and that things may be different

from how they look” (p. 33). Viewing curiosity as “unbridled inquisitiveness” in their research with global leaders, Gregersen et al. (1998) found that “Inquisitiveness is the fuel for increasing their global savvy, enhancing their ability to understand people and maintain integrity, and augmenting their capacity for dealing with uncertainty and managing tension” (p. 23). In building a bridge between intercultural relations and inclusion, curiosity would appear to be essential for accomplishing typical diversity goals.

Other core affective competencies include openmindedness, tolerance of ambiguity, adaptability, and cultural humility. While most of these characteristics are well-known, cultural humility is less frequently defined. Guskin (1991) refers to this way of being in the world as respecting the validity of other peoples’ cultures, questioning the primacy of our own perspective, and recognizing that we may not know what is really going on!

### **BEHAVIORAL COMPETENCIES**

In the behavioral dimension, *empathy* is the most frequently cited skill, along with the ability to listen, communicate, resolve conflict, manage anxiety, and develop relationships. Of these, empathy is the core competency, defined as “the imaginative intellectual and emotional participation in another person’s experience” (Bennett, 1998, p. 207). In other words, empathy is an attempt to understand another person by imagining the individual’s perspective. Especially in relating across cultures, this is not to be confused with imagining ourselves in the other person’s position. The latter approach, labeled sympathy, is irrelevant when we find ourselves interacting with someone who does not share our worldview. For instance, it is an act of sympathy to feel sorrow and

grief for the Japanese people after the horrendous earthquake and tsunami of 2011. It is an act of empathy to grasp the experience from their collective cultural perspective and understand how a group of people so traumatized would return millions of dollars of cash washed up on the shores of their country to fellow victims (Fujita, 2011). The usual context of intercultural relations, where worldviews are not shared, language may obstruct, and deep values clash in our dialogues, thus requires empathy, not sympathy. As Goleman (1995) notes in his research on emotional intelligence, “. . . all rapport. . . stems from emotional attunement, from the capacity for empathy” (p. 96). Although Pettigrew (2008) suggests that empathy may be the most significant mediator of prejudice reduction, it is certainly one of the more challenging competencies to develop, whether in global or domestic contexts.

### **CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN INTEGRATING INTERCULTURAL AND INCLUSION PERSPECTIVES**

There has been occasional resistance to including intercultural relations in diversity and inclusion efforts. Interculturalists have been accused of *exotifying* other cultures, seeking the intriguing aspects of global cultures rather than facing powerful issues of discrimination at home. Some suggest that any effort to describe patterns in other culture groups is *essentializing*, suggesting that interculturalists attribute stereotypical characteristics to culture groups while ignoring wide variations and that such research must be contested. Others warn that research reifies cultural attributes in such a way as to deny the dynamic and contextual aspects of cultural interactions and insist that this expresses a neocolonial point of view.

Most interculturalists acknowledge these important concerns and often employ



social constructivist perspectives, confirming the notion that patterns exist in context, not as an immutable reality. The constructivist approach considers the role of the individual, the situation, and the society in the dynamic process of culture creation, particularly as it relates to the creation of shared meaning in interaction. With intercultural competence as the foundation, we can examine the issues of power and prejudice, of bias and discrimination, and bring to the surface the various privileges that allow certain cultural patterns to exist. For instance, the capacity to recognize cultural conflict styles would support a truly intercultural dialogue, finding satisfaction both in highly emotional exchanges as well as reserved, limited participation.

At the same time, the intercultural field recognizes the important research on cultural patterns that produces what Kochman and Mavrelis (2009) call a *cultural archetype*, described as “a shared value, pattern, or attitude that insiders would accept as representative of a significant number of members of their group” (p. 6). They suggest that archetypes are “scientifically generated through the ‘ethnographic process’ ” (p. 6), creating generalizations that are verifiable through the authoritative observations of ingroup members, always acknowledging that no hypothesized pattern applies to any single individual. Many professionals use the visual of a statistical normal curve, suggesting the notion that while there is a central tendency (a cultural pattern or archetype) for many cultural variables, there are outliers at either end of the curve, those individuals who for a variety of reasons do not fit the pattern.

While these challenges noted above may present barriers to the integration of culture learning into diversity and inclusion, there are also compelling social realities that suggest a more unified approach is called for (Bennett & Bennett, 2004). First, the notion

that domestic inclusion initiatives can be exported globally has been identified as ethnocentric (Solomon, 1994). The content of domestic programs may be alien to other environments and cultures. Further, the pedagogy, the cognitive styles, and learning styles often defy the very nature of the goal, yielding an inclusion initiative that is not inclusive (Yershova, DeJaeghere, & Mestenhauser, 2000). While diversity professionals often modify examples to export training and development, the training design and implementation is often ill suited to the learning patterns in other societies.

Second, the artificial bifurcation of intercultural training for global sojourners, whether corporate transferees or international students, and the diversity training on social justice here in the US may leave individuals unprepared for bridging cultures, whether on campus or in the workplace (Wentling & Palma-Rivas, 2000). International students are puzzled by diversity issues at their universities; study abroad students impose their American perspective on social issues as guests in other countries; and international corporate managers are befuddled by typical diversity standards in the organization as they relate to gender, sexual orientation, and race. The supporters of diversity may not notice the barriers that the domestic point of view presents to those external to the American context.

Finally, the migration of refugees, immigrants, and transferees stimulates the question of “Who is ethnically diverse?” Is the recently arrived non-English-speaking Chinese immigrant Asian American? Is she Asian? Is she American? Is her identity based on her passport culture? What about the Albanian man? Is he a White male? Is the Ghanaian global transferee an American African? A person of African descent? Is this biracial/bicultural student one culture or the other? Or both? What is domestic? What is

global? To neglect the inclusion of these diverse individuals hardly seems inclusive, and yet the domestic diversity approach seldom emphasizes the deep involvement of these internationally diverse individuals in the organization. Whether in education or the corporate context, despite high-quality domestic inclusion models, the inclusion of global diversity is often missing (Smith, Garcia, Hudgins, Musil, Nettles, & Sedlacek, 2000; Williams, Berger, & McClendon, 2005), if not downright marginalized.

Further, there is no shortage of organization mission statements that urge the workforce or the campus to value, respect, and appreciate diversity (Meacham & Gaff, 2006). These statements offer suggestions of the outcomes to be achieved: greater productivity, better customer service/student satisfaction, competitive advantage, increased retention, global citizenship, community impact, increased market share, and effective management. However, few mission statements suggest that these outcomes would be more likely if the workforce developed intercultural competence and adapted to the cultural differences present in the organization. Instead, heartening statistics are offered regarding the existing affinity groups, the increase in diverse suppliers, and data on “compositional diversity” (Milem, Chang, & Antonio, 2005), all of which are obviously good things, and often much easier to measure.

There are many ways in which intercultural skills can facilitate the goal of inclusion, which is to respect and encourage the full participation of all individuals and groups. For example, interviewing diverse applicants is frequently a culturally challenging task. Whether it is a “weak” handshake, downcast gaze, or effusive communication style, qualified candidates are often overlooked for lack of “fit.” Further, efforts to counteract this bias tend to produce equality when equity is called for. We may

treat the candidates the same when, in fact, to level the playing field may require different cultural skills to enhance equity. In the US the typical interviewing style privileges the European American culture, which prefers linear, direct, and emotionally restrained interactions. A recent conversation with a large global employer outlined measures used to assure fair treatment: the use of identical questions, no follow-up questions, 45-minute maximum interview time, only over-the-phone interviews (so nonverbal behavior could not corrupt the interview), and quantitative ratings of the applicant. Contrast this with a similar global employer who conducts three-day assessments on site, using multiple small group activities with a group of applicants observed by the interviewing team, various in-basket tasks, with multiple assessments of intercultural competence and personality. By varying the input to the assessment, the latter employer is more likely to include styles appropriate for a variety of cultures.

Interviewing is only one function of the organization that benefits from intercultural competence. Many of the primary goals of existing diversity and inclusion programs include a variety of functions that can be effectively supported by enhanced communication skills: recruitment and retention of members of underrepresented groups, management of a diverse workforce, productivity of multicultural teams, marketing across cultures, and development of a climate of respect for diversity in the organization, among others. The climate further improves when leaders are capable of conducting inclusive meetings, planning inclusive social events, and coaching and mentoring across cultures. This demands more than awareness, more than understanding; it requires adaptation built on the development of intercultural competence.

## **TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT OF INTERCULTURAL**

## **COMPETENCE**

While many disciplines share in the dialogue on intercultural competence, the perspective of intercultural communication is particularly useful in developing inclusive leadership in organizations and systems. Intercultural communication is the interactive process of creating shared meanings between or among people from different cultures. Often described in the past as the study of face-to-face interaction between individuals who have differing values, beliefs, and behaviors, intercultural communication now includes mediated communication as well, for instance, how culture impacts online learning or social networks (Edmundson, 2007). Intercultural communication focuses on what happens when individuals with contrasting patterns interact, how they create shared meaning, and how they express culture.

The remainder of this chapter reviews the application of intercultural concepts and models for creating a bridge between diversity/inclusion and global diversity perspectives.

### **THE DEVELOPMENTAL MODEL OF INTERCULTURAL SENSITIVITY**

There are several models in the field of intercultural communication that are useful to the intercultural trainer and educator. Two that are pertinent to intercultural work are the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) (M. J. Bennett, 1986, 1993; Bennett & Bennett, 2004) and the Support and Challenge Model (Bennett, 2009b).

### **INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE**

When we are working on diversity and inclusion or global diversity, we are fundamentally exploring the individual's response to the experience of difference. When

meeting a new Generation X employee with a different work ethic, how does the Boomer manager react? When confronting a customer service representative from India, how does the IT director respond? What happens on the diverse virtual team when one member appears to be taking credit for the team's accomplishment? In each of these situations, there is an opportunity for an interculturally effective outcome.

Much depends on the mindset the actors bring to the experience of difference. The DMIS (Figure 1) suggests a predictable pattern of responses to difference based on the worldview the individual brings to the encounter with others. Moving from ethnocentric positions, where difference is avoided, to ethnorelative positions, where difference is sought after, the model outlines six distinct mindsets that affect interactions with culturally different others, with each position suggesting particular competencies as developmental goals.

The DMIS supports a developmental design for training, education, coaching, and program design, allowing for precisely targeted interventions and initiatives (Bennett, 2009b; Bennett & Bennett, 2004). For instance, a human resource professional in a large global corporation was able to use the DMIS to assess the readiness level of each unit of the organization before she rolled out a diversity initiative for 150,000 employees. She was acutely aware that in one community there was curiosity and openness, and in another, there would be resistance to the most basic interventions. She successfully planned her programming with an intentionally developmental design to avoid creating backlash. In the resistant community, the curriculum included user-friendly topics and activities specifically directed to move them to a different mindset. A more advanced explanation of gender and race was included in a separate curriculum for those with more

complex mindsets about cultural difference. What this suggests is the wise application of Shepard's rules for change agents: "Start where the system is. . . never work uphill. . . don't build hills as you go. . . load experiments for success" (Shepard, 2011, pp. 704-707). Essentially, the DMIS facilitates starting where the system is. For those interested in conducting an assessment of a specific audience, a psychometric instrument, the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI), is available to measure these positions (Hammer, 2009; Hammer & Bennett, 2003; Paige, Jacobs-Cassuto, Yershova, & DeJaeghere, 2003).

Within the ethnocentric stages, there are three mindsets for avoiding difference: Denial of difference, Defense against difference, and Minimization of difference. The ethnorelative stages include three mindsets for seeking out difference: Acceptance of difference, Adaptation to difference, and Integration of difference.

The following section will briefly describe each mindset of the DMIS and note the developmental task most appropriate for the readiness level of the audience.

### ***Denial Mindset***

When individuals live in blissful ignorance of the existence of differences, and fail to see any relevance to their own lives, they may be viewing the world through a position of Denial. In the Denial mindset, the person has few categories for recognizing and construing culture. Having rarely experienced cultural difference, the person may observe a few superficial differences, see them as irrelevant, and, in any case, perceive that culture has little to do with life as it is lived in the world of Denial. In the workplace, this leaves the organization vulnerable to cultural surprises, whether in the form of low retention, constant conflict, unproductive teams, or grievances. There may be a climate of

disinterest or disregard for differences. The developmental task is to introduce the individual to the existence of difference and its significance to the organization.

### ***Defense Mindset***

In this position, after recognizing that differences do indeed exist, the person defends against difference, either by denigrating others or assuming a superior posture. The Defense mindset is typically a polarizing position, taking an either/or stance, defending the person's own identity, culture group, race, gender, or other affinity groups against other perspectives. The Defense mindset also includes a variation labeled "reversal," in which people polarize against their own ingroup. This is often mistaken for intercultural sensitivity, since it appears to be a deep commitment to inclusion. But unfortunately that inclusion is accompanied by defense against the ingroup. For example, in a recent coaching session, a diversity trainer was horrified to discover that she was in the Defense position on the Intercultural Development Inventory. When it became clear to her that her defense posture was against her own culture group, she blurted out, "That's right! I dread training these people every day!" Polarization still yields the us/them distinction, but the poles have merely changed. Within the organization, there may be efforts to undermine equal opportunity, attempts to make sure all employees conform to a single cultural style, half-hearted recruitment efforts, and expressions of outright prejudice. With this mindset, the developmental task is to emphasize similarity and identification with outgroup members. This is the only stage of intercultural competence where similarities are emphasized rather than differences. When individuals see others as part of their ingroup for whatever reason, there is less anxiety and uncertainty, diminishing the threat of contact (Gudykunst, 1995).



### ***Minimization Mindset***

If the person begins to feel others are in some broad sense “just like me,” the predominant mindset is Minimization of difference, where the emphasis is on physiological or psychological similarity. For example, people with this mindset might say, “The only race is the human race!” or “It’s all about personality types.”

Sometimes the minimization is based on a presumed shared philosophy, such as a belief that everyone wants democracy or freedom. Any minor differences are construed through the person’s own ethnocentric worldview and explained in terms of the ingroup culture, while any major differences are potential threats to the minimization position. If the person thinks we are all alike in deep ways, and the outgroup member reveals a significant difference offensive to the ingroup’s values, the person in Minimization is in danger of slipping back to Defense: “I thought you were like me, but I guess I was wrong. I can’t tolerate your approach.”

Within the organization, Minimization has several outcomes. First, there may be unconscious exercise of privilege. Second, there may be naïveté about how power gets exercised with a self-congratulatory posture. (“We don’t see color.”) Third, in an effort to be equal and gain control over the organization’s culture, there may be extreme pressure for conformity to a dominant culture model, resulting in global team conflict and loss of diversity as a resource. Mentoring programs coach the norms of the ingroup; performance appraisals assess people based on ingroup patterns; promotions have a hidden criterion, “fit.” The developmental task is to acquaint these individuals with their own cultural patterns. Many intercultural professionals include such topics in their diversity work, for

example: nonverbal behavior, communication styles, values, interaction rituals, conflict styles, cognitive styles, and learning styles. (Topics such as identity development, stereotyping, privilege, gender, power, and prejudice are best promoted in the ethnorelative/difference-seeking mindsets.) These topics draw from many disciplines, but are employed in the examination of meaning making.

If individuals are unaware they have a culture, it allows for the frame that everyone is the same and, by the way, anyone who is truly different just has not yet learned how to do it the right way. Cultural self-awareness, described earlier as the core cognitive intercultural competency, is the primary developmental goal for those with a Minimization mindset, that is, achieving recognition of one's own culture that demonstrates cultural humility.

### ***Acceptance Mindset***

Once a degree of cultural self-awareness has been attained, the DMIS suggests the person is moving from ethnocentrism to ethnorelativism, from avoiding difference to seeking difference. This position reflects a person who no longer sees the world through a filter of a single unexamined worldview but through a cultural filter that has been brought into consciousness. The position of Acceptance reflects this self-knowledge and fosters recognition and appreciation of cultural differences in behavior and values. With more complex categories for construing differences, people are now capable of beginning the process of exploring general contrasts between their own and other cultures. Building on the core affective competence of curiosity, this mindset promotes such exploration, which generally assumes a nonevaluative perspective for purposes of understanding. This does not imply a mindless cultural relativism, where all differences are perceived to be

acceptable, but rather a thoughtful exploration of what the differences are before forming a judgment.

In the organization, Acceptance promotes active efforts to recruit and retain a globally and domestically diverse workforce, where managers are encouraged to recognize and value differences and “talk the talk.” However, they are not yet required to “walk the walk” or to adapt their own styles using effective intercultural skills. The group may resemble a rainbow, and the lunchroom may sound like the United Nations, but mutual efforts to actually adapt are not evident. The developmental task for this mindset is to refine the analysis of cultural contrasts, to recognize more complex patterns, and to use generalizations about cultural archetypes as testable hypotheses.

### ***Adaptation Mindset***

Based on this more complex analysis of culture, the individual is likely moving into the mindset of Adaptation, aware now that successful interaction across cultures is built on mutual adjustment of styles to create shared meaning. This developmental level is the appropriate mindset for managers, faculty, and anyone in the position of trying to engage others appropriately and effectively across cultures. It builds on the core intercultural competence skill of empathy, the powerful capacity to shift frames of reference, noted earlier.

Within the organization, there are rewards for interculturally competent performance, and professionals see their roles as requiring constant attention to addressing intercultural development. This in turn leads to higher retention and becoming an employer of choice. Culture in all of its forms becomes a resource globally and domestically. The developmental task involves nurturing frame-of-reference shifting

skills and cultivation of adaptation strategies.

### ***Integration Mindset***

Sometimes, if the adaptation process is intense enough or long enough, an individual may reach the final position of the DMIS, Integration. This may happen after several years of acculturation during an overseas sojourn outside the home culture or after constant pressure to adapt to a dominant culture. Not to be confused with the vernacular use of “integration,” this mindset describes the capabilities of the bicultural or multicultural person who is able to readily shift into the frame of reference of two or more cultures, often with language fluency and equivalent cultural competence (J. M. Bennett, 1993). This state of dynamic-in-betweenness suggests the notion of a fluid adaptation from one culture to another, in a movement similar to the Mobius strip or infinity symbol (Yoshikawa, 1987). While this is not an expected position for the majority of the workforce, it should be noted that those who have lived abroad, spent their childhood in other cultures, or who currently live as immigrants, refugees, transferees, or underrepresented groups in a different society may have reached this developmental level. Within the organization, a mindset of Integration supports an overall climate of intercultural competence, where every action, policy, and issue is viewed through cultural filters. The corporate culture is therefore defined by its intercultural competence, not exclusively through a single national or ethnic identity. The organization is able to effectively leverage the resources represented by this mindset. The developmental task for individuals who have reached this position is to continue efforts to resolve their identity concerns.

## **THE CHALLENGE AND SUPPORT MODEL**

In addition to the DMIS, which allows us to structure interventions to address the developmental readiness of the group, the Challenge and Support Model provides a systematic strategy for reducing threat (Bennett, 2009b). When we encounter The Other—the unfamiliar stranger in our world—things may be different from how we expect them to be. We may be confounded by our counterparts agreeing to a deliverable they simply cannot deliver, or we might feel manipulated by the mysterious verbal circles painted by a colleague. We may have no precedent for this behavior and be shocked by our own irritation. The result might be a teachable moment, a trigger event that provides us with a cultural learning opportunity (Osland, Bird, & Gundersen, 2007).

However, if that sudden exposure is too unpredictable or too anxiety producing, it could trigger our flight response. There is a lengthy and substantial literature exploring the importance of reducing this anxiety and uncertainty to manageable levels during intercultural contact (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew, 2008; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2011). The Anxiety/Uncertainty Management (AUM) theory puts forth the notion that both uncertainty (cognitive, involving knowledge and predictability) and anxiety (affective, involving emotional stability) must be carefully balanced to not exceed the maximum tolerable, but be over the minimal level to encourage learning (Gudykunst, 1995). In other words, how do our programs create just enough disequilibrium to stimulate curiosity and culture learning, but not so much as to alienate participants, to build hills as we go?

Sanford (1966) proposes the notion of challenge and support that proves useful in the intercultural context. Depending on a wide variety of factors, the professional administering the program needs to examine for each participant what aspects of the

context can provide support and what aspects present challenges. In any learning context, if the participants are overly supported, no learning takes place. If the participants are overly challenged, the individual flees the learning context and, of course, no learning takes place. In the intercultural context, depending on their culture and developmental worldview, participants may find certain content very challenging or affirming of their experience. Diversity initiatives must balance challenge and support to maximize the opportunity of culture learning and culture contact (Bennett, 2009b).

By combining the DMIS and the Challenge and Support Model, we can assess participant readiness and adjust the level of support and challenge. For instance, if we suspect that the group we are working with finds cultural difference quite challenging (from the Denial or Defense mindset), we can create initial programming that is highly supportive in both content and methods. For instance, a trainer may use a feedback instrument to explore issues of difference that are not cultural, such as learning styles or personality differences. Members of different culture groups can explore their similarities safely this way.

As a rule, groups are likely to have somewhat ethnocentric mindsets and therefore find intercultural competence efforts challenging, at best, and quite threatening, at worst. Once the critical mass of participants has reached an Acceptance or Adaptation mindset, human resource, training, and education professionals can then intentionally and strategically increase the challenge, for instance by introducing the powerful issues of prejudice, bias, and power.

## **CONCLUSION**

For a long time, I have said “You can do diversity training anyway you want, as

long as it works.” And this is still true; there is no absolute formula that will bond intercultural learning and diversity into a fail-safe package. Nevertheless, research supports the notion that certain models are more likely to succeed than others. Using an intercultural competence perspective to build a bridge between these contemporary approaches to difference, we are more likely to generate light than heat. We are more likely to communicate effectively across cultures while discussing core social justice issues. And we are more likely to prepare our constituencies to work with culturally different others in substantially more appropriate ways. Optimistically, the interdisciplinary nature of both inclusion and intercultural relations would seem to be an obviously fertile ground for shared perspectives to grow. In the absence of the ideal model, using the available intercultural tools that we have provides a theoretical rationale for why we do what we do, a posture that suggests high potential for successful work.

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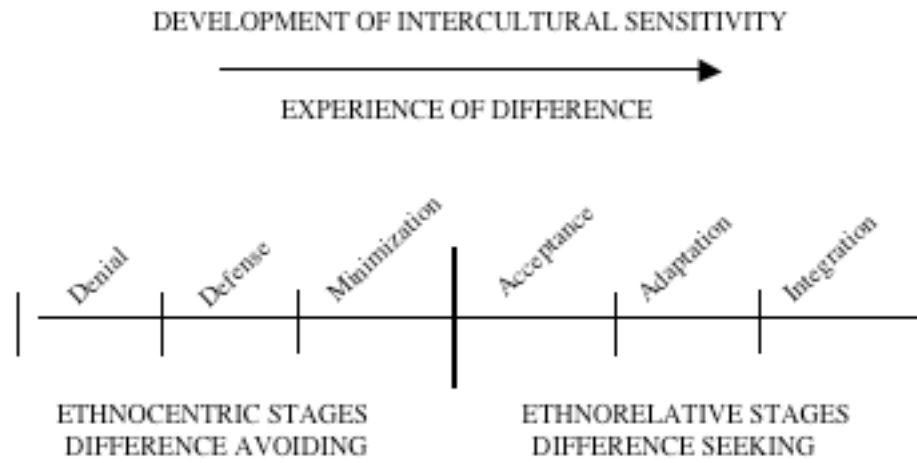


Figure 1