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Creating Value with Diverse Teams in Global Management

JOSEPH J. DISTEFANO MARTHA L. MAZNEVSKI

INTRODUCTION

Today's economy increasingly requires people to collaborate in teams that cross cultural and geographic boundaries. Sometimes team members are all located in the same physical setting. More and more frequently, they are scattered across a city, a country, or the globe. In theory, these teams should create significant competitive advantage by bringing together different ideas, pools of knowledge, and approaches to work. However, in practice global teams do not often create the value expected. Instead, members clash, and the teams are either paralyzed into inaction or worse. With today's workforce demographics, the existence of culturally diverse teams is inevitable; and with today's competitive environment, firms cannot afford to forego their value.

A few years ago we began a systematic study of multicultural teams. The literature told us that diverse teams have a lot of potential. Compared to homogeneous teams they can be more creative, generate more and better alternatives to problems, and generate more and better criteria for evaluating alternatives. However, in no research did diverse teams outperform homogeneous ones on overall solution quality, and in only one study did they equal the homogeneous teams. But a couple of studies and a wealth of anecdotal evidence suggested a slightly different story. Diverse teams tend to perform either better or worse than homogeneous ones, with more performing worse than better (see Fig. 1). We set out to determine what distinguished the poor performers from the high performers, and to develop ways of helping culturally diverse teams at the bottom of the performance graph leapfrog the homogeneous teams and create value.

Why Focus on Multicultural Teams?

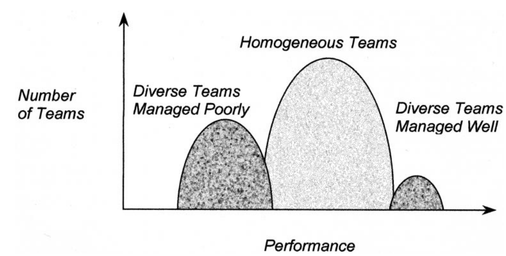
Members of global teams differ from each other in many important ways: gender, thinking style, function or profession, and so

Our research was augmented by consulting relationships, executive education sessions, and case-writing experiences in many companies. To illustrate the principles described here, we have drawn from these experiences; however, because of the sensitive nature of some of the examples, we have not named the specific teams or organizations as we recount their stories here. All names given are pseudonyms, but the industries have been maintained. The organizations we have worked with include: Arthur Andersen, Caltex, Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce, Ciba–Geigy, Citibank, Commercial Union Assurance Company, Deloitte Touche, Dow Chemical, Ernst & Young, Exxon, Fairfax County Board of Education, First Brands, General Electric, Hong Kong Civil Service Training and Development Center, Hong Kong Productivity Council, Human Factors AS, Husky Oil, IBM, Kodak, London Life, Manulife, Millipore, Polysar, Royal Bank, Salvatore Ferragamo, Schneider Electric, Shell, Sony, Sun Life Insurance Company, the World Bank, and many universities.

Joseph J. DiStefano, is professor of organizational behavior and international management at the International Institute for Management Development (IMD) in Lausanne. He has been actively teaching, researching and consulting in the North America, Europe and the Asia-Pacific region for over thirty years. Until recently, he was on the faculty of the Richard Ivey School of Business, including three years as the Shirley Chan Memorial Professor of International Business and executive director of Ivey's Cheng Yu Tung Management Institute in Hong Kong. DiStefano earned a B.S. in mathematics at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, an MBA at Harvard Business School, and an MA and PhD in social psychology at Cornell University. He is the recipient of The University of Western Ontario's Pleva Award for Excellence in Teaching and serves on both private sector and voluntary boards of directors in the U.S. and Canada.

DiStefano's research interests include cross-cultural management, organizational effectiveness and human resource management. He has written over 100 cases and numerous articles and has (co)authored several books and monographs, including *International Management Behavior*, 4th ed. (in English and Chinese), *Human Resource Development & Management* (in English and Chinese) and *Effective Managerial Action*.

FIGURE 1 DIVERSE TEAMS CAN OUTPERFORM HOMOGENEOUS ONES



on. Why do we focus our attention on the multicultural nature of these teams? Cultural differences are especially important to global teams for two main reasons. First, cultural differences provide the greatest potential to hinder effective interaction within teams. Culture is a society's or defined group's assumptions and norms for how people interact with each other and approach what they do. Each society develops a different set of assumptions and norms under which to operate, and different professions, functions, and even genders within a society or organization can have different cultures themselves. Team members from different cultures therefore come to the group setting with very different predefined notions about how a group should proceed. Furthermore, cultural values and norms are deeply held, and almost always implicit and taken for granted. Their deepest effects on behavior and interaction are usually hidden, and extremely difficult to identify and address. Cultural differences inevitably hinder smooth interaction.

On the other hand, because of the nature of culture, cultural differences also provide the greatest potential for creating value. Culture affects what we notice, how we interpret it, what we decide to do about it, and how we execute our ideas. Multicultural teams, then, have an enormous wealth of material with which to create innovative approaches to complex organizational challenges, and a broad range of operating modes with which to develop new ways of implementing solutions. Today's business cannot flourish without the creative value afforded by high-performing global teams.

With this acknowledgment of culture and its impact, we launched our study of the multicultural dynamics in teams.

Global Teams Come in Three Models

The first thing we noticed was that global teams fell into one of three clear performance categories, not just into the two we expected. We called these patterns destroying, equalizing, and creating.

The destroyers

Some multicultural teams were unmitigated disasters. Their members mistrusted each other, guarded information jealously, and took every opportunity to attack other members. One European member explained his team's poor performance to us forcefully: "Those Brits on our team are too serious, the Germans are so stuck up about engineering they don't think anyone else has a brain, and the French couldn't care less about production quotas." In these cases, the energy that could have been channeled into effective work was drained into negative stereotyping. "Team" decisions were made by the manager or formal leader without genuine discussion among members. The "team" destroyed value rather than creating it.

The equalizers

The second pattern was the most puzzling; it was also the one we saw most frequently. If a diverse team had been working together for a while, members typically told us with pride, "We handle our differences well! They don't affect our performance—we moved beyond that long ago. We have great meetings. Everyone gives their input; we resolve things pretty quickly and move on. Frankly, all this diversity hype is blown way out of proportion." These teams' senior managers, though, usually told a slightly different story. One executive told us, "I guess they are getting

Martha L. Maznevski, is assistant professor of organizational behavior and international management at the McIntire School of Commerce, University of Virginia. She earned a BEd from the University of Toronto, and a BA in anthropology and PhD in business administration, focusing on international organizational behavior, from the University of Western Ontario. She researches, teaches, and consults in the areas of strategic human resources, multicultural team performance, international management, and global leadership, with recent activities in North America, Europe and Asia. She has presented and published numerous articles on these subjects, and is a co-author of the textbook *International Management Behavior*. Her current research focuses on the on-going dynamics of high-performing teams and networks in multinational organizations.

things accomplished. But they assembled the best minds in the company, then produced a compromise that didn't even approach the expected cost savings. We might get the benefits we hoped for eventually, but I'm more than a little disappointed!"

In a word: mediocrity. The teams helped their companies stay in the game. But by not allowing the differences to surface in any way, the teams suffered because they couldn't leverage them for innovation or performance advantages. We began to call this pattern "equalizing": suppressing differences to smooth processes, and in turn suppressing differences in ideas and perspectives. We suspect most culturally diverse teams that think of themselves as "doing well" are really equalizers.

The creators

Some multicultural teams, of course, do perform at high levels, with results exceeding even their own expectations. These teams go far beyond the buzzwords "value diversity." Differences are explicitly recognized and accepted, even nurtured, and their implications are incorporated into every facet of the group's processes. Watching these teams is like watching a top-performing jazz ensemble. The players all recognize the mastery of the others, and understand the potential for synergy arising from their combinations. They develop a constantly shifting dynamic that incorporates innovation into cooperative structures. We've seen these unique teams create value by bringing highly successful products to market in record time, achieving quantum leaps in cost savings in a price-competitive industry, inventing new types of alliances with global suppliers and clients, and moving successfully into territory that others have been unable to conquer.

How did these high performing teams achieve such success? We found that the key was not in the membership—on average, their members weren't any better in their individual areas than those on destroying or equalizing teams. The key to unlocking creative synergy was in the team's interaction processes—how they understood, incorporated, and leveraged their differences.

THREE STEPS TO CREATING VALUE: MAP, BRIDGE, INTEGRATE

Creator teams interacted according to the three principles of mapping, bridging, and integrating (MBI). To **map**, they described the differences among members and the impact of those differences in objective, measurable ways. To **bridge**, they communicated in ways that explicitly took the differences into account. **Integrating** directed them to create team-level ideas by carefully monitoring participation patterns, resolving disagreements, and creating new perspectives. We have since introduced these principles, summarized in Fig. 2, to many destroying and equalizing teams and observed dramatic turnarounds in their performance. By applying these principles in a dedicated and committed way, any global team can become a creator.

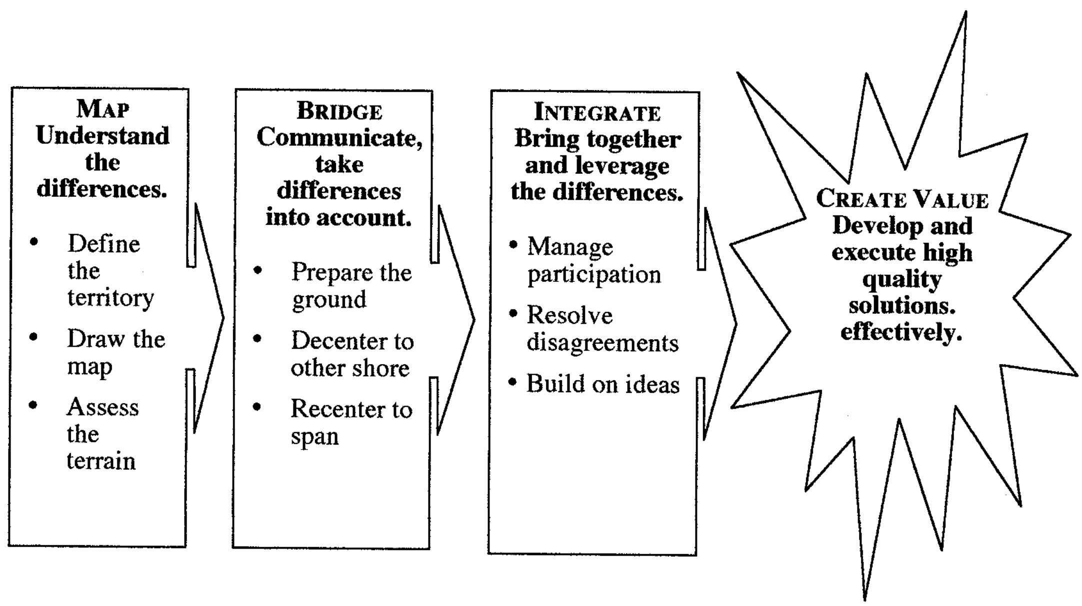
Mapping to Understand Differences

The principle of mapping requires a commitment to understand the underlying characteristics affecting each member's approach to the team. In a multinational team it may seem obvious that members will have different perspectives, but deliberately mapping these differences develops an appreciation of how they affect teamwork. There are three steps to the mapping principle: selecting which characteristics to map, describing members' characteristics, and identifying their impact.

Define the territory

This is usually a simple, although not trivial, matter. At some level we are all different, but acknowledging this is not terribly helpful. The idea here is to identify which differences will make a difference. Which ones will most likely raise barriers to interaction? Which dif-

FIGURE 2 CREATING VALUE IN DIVERSE TEAMS: THE MBI APPROACH



ferences can be most leveraged to help the team achieve its objectives? In almost any multinational team, cultural differences will influence how the team works together—as well as offer enormous potential for innovation—so mapping culture is critical. But differences associated with personality, thinking or learning style, gender or profession may also affect the team's dynamics in important ways. Members must fully understand these differences to prevent their negative effects and realize their positive potential.

Draw the map

In this step, teams assess each member's characteristics on the selected dimensions. Teams can map their difference profiles on their own, for example as guided by the Appendix, or tap the expertise of their human resource departments. In situations where success and failure represent high stakes, investing in survey instruments to map differences is wise. When trying to understand the type and extent of differences among team members, there is nothing as compelling as having your own data with a numerical comparison to others. Members who assume they are "pretty similar" are often shocked to find out how different their scores are on cultural values or thinking style. This surprise itself often leads to an insightful exploration of the implications for performance.

Assess the terrain

To assess the terrain, the team uses the map of members' dimensions to help understand past, current, and future potential dynamics. Ideally, the team maps its characteristics early and anticipates both problems and potential, incorporating mechanisms to alleviate the former and leverage the latter into their ongoing processes. Sometimes mapping comes after interaction has already happened, and can help explain past incidents. Most global teams do not take the time to map cultural differences up front; they just rely on broad generalizations (stereotypes) they have heard. But by not mapping, these teams cannot address the differences objectively, and the problems caused by the differences cannot be resolved. These teams turn to mapping culture after becoming frustrated with a lack of performance. They use the mapping to understand the problems that have already occurred, and set the stage for future expectations.

Develop cartographers

In practice, mapping is not as simple as it sounds. In fact, good mapping is often the most difficult stage for multicultural teams, because it requires a great amount of energy seemingly outside the team's official mandate. It is easy to start with good intentions, but then slip into negative stereotyping—assuming that people who see things differently or present them in different ways are not valuable. This is what destroying teams do, and this is the fatal step that begins their destruction. A Uruguayan was on a team of petroleum executives that also included two Americans and single members from Britain, Japan and Belgium. The team was engaged in a critical discussion of an acquisition opportunity. Three times the Uruguayan tried to raise issues of who would compose the top executive team. He was overruled each time by the dominance of the American and British managers, who dismissed his concerns about people as much less important than the financial analysis and because, "he's always bringing up the soft issues. How were we supposed to know that this time it was related to hard stuff?"

It is also deceptively appealing to ignore differences and focus on similarities. This is what equalizing teams do. The differences don't get in the way and things go smoothly, but the differences also never get used to help the team. A bank operations group in Toronto, made up of a rich diversity of Asians, South Americans, Caribbeans, Central Europeans and French–Canadians, was preparing to work as a self-managed team. They were performing fine, but improvements had been leveling off, and they found themselves vaguely disappointed in their inability to improve productivity. They mapped their cultural differences, and then sat down to watch a videotape of their most recent meeting. All members were surprised when they saw their own behavior. A Thai woman spoke for them all when she exclaimed, "That's not me; that's me acting like our old boss!" They realized that they had been suppressing their normal behavior. In the absence of their former supervisor (an Anglo–Canadian) they had been trying to behave just like him. Dampening their preferred modes, of course, had also interfered with their ability to use their differences. They used this insight to adapt to their new responsibilities; over time, they improved both their functioning as a team and their work output.

Creator teams assume differences and use the map as a starting point to frame the differences and talk about them. They use their differences to explain problems when things don't go as expected. They are committed to continued mapping, adding more detail to their descriptions as their experiences working together continue. In a large California research and development (R&D) operation of a French-owned global electrical manufacturer, the American senior manager was experiencing difficulties with two of his research teams. Looking more carefully at their makeup, he realized the team leaders of the groups were from Poland and Belgium, and that their groups were extremely diverse in their cultural makeup. The Polish leader had 14 different nationalities in his team of 16 and the Belgian's team of 12 people contained eight different nationalities. The senior manager had each team map their cultural differences, share the information within the team, and then work to learn as much as possible about the cultures of the other members and how the differences related to their interactions within the team. It was both the mapping and the incorporating of that knowledge into their work that made them effective.

This team, as did all the other creator teams we observed, realized quickly that mapping by itself is not enough to generate value in a diverse team. Even if the mapping principle is fully realized, high performance doesn't automatically follow. Creator teams were also committed to the next principle and skilled at its implementation.

Bridging to Communicate Across Differences

Bridging, or communicating effectively across the differences to bring people and ideas together, is the next important principle in the MBI approach. Effective communication is "sending and receiving meaning *as it was intended*." We are all too familiar with miscommunication, especially in situations marked by diversity. Those stories can be humorous, but they tend to have unfortunate endings. The key to bridging is to prevent miscommunication. There are three steps to building a strong bridge in a diverse team: Prepare, Decenter, and Recenter.

Prepare the ground

Preparing well sets the foundation for building a good bridge. Team members must encourage and reinforce two important attitudes: *motivation* to communicate and integrate effectively, and *confidence* to overcome any difficulties. We always want others to understand us, but we are often much less anxious to understand others. Even after mapping to understand important differences, team members may not be motivated to use these differences to improve performance. Confidence is sometimes even more elusive. In fact, team members are generally more confident before mapping than they are immediately afterward. The complexity surprises and discourages them. However, once teams take the initial efforts to bridge and integrate well, good results and more refined skills follow quickly, with improved confidence.

Each team becomes motivated and gains confidence differently, but motivation and confidence should *always* be related to the team's task. In a financial services firm, global cross-functional client teams looked at examples of other teams and how much they had increased business. In one case the multiple was 100-fold, with a significant starting base. Then each team estimated its client's potential business, and worked with related data. After seeing how much potential business there was, the teams engaged with strong commitment towards those goals. They were prepared to bridge. In a large multinational, senior managers put together cross-national, cross-functional teams to achieve extraordinary cost cutting in strategic areas of the company. To prepare the teams, these senior managers attended the teams' first meetings, reinforcing the task's importance and magnitude as well as top management's confidence in the team members.

A diverse team can't always count on senior managers to prepare the ground. The bank managers overseeing the operations team described earlier couldn't provide quantitative measures for the team's improvement, and frankly were skeptical that this team could become truly self-managed. But the team members themselves were proud of the progress they had already made in moving towards self-management. They had a history of taking each new problem, addressing it systematically, and then resolving it. When they ran into some difficulties posed by their differences—starting with an argument about hosting a senior manager from another part of the organization—they became anxious. Rather than give in to destroying or equalizing, they attacked this new issue with enthusiasm and discipline. Their motivation and confidence were internal: they wanted to improve performance, and to prove to senior management that they could do this. Rather than ignore their differences, they were prepared to bridge them.

Decenter: Build to the other shore

Decentering is the second step to building a bridge in a diverse team. To decenter, members of the team take what they know about each other's differences from mapping and apply it to adapt their own behavior and thinking. They change their conversation style and adapt their interaction behaviors according to the culture of the people they're working with. Decentering is not quite the same as empathy. Empathy is getting inside another person's skin, thinking as the other person thinks and feeling what the other person feels. But decentering goes beyond identifying with the other and *uses* the understanding gained by mapping in both listening to others and responding to them. Decentering is empathy in practice, with the map as a translation key.

The other important element in decentering is *suspending judgment.* We have a nearly universal tendency to react instinctively to differences as bad. "They" are different from "us." "We" are right and good; therefore "they" are wrong and bad. Even when people are conscious about cultural or other differences, the evaluative instinct kicks in quickly. This tends to be even more common when the differences are subtle rather than overt, or when time is tight. But effective communication requires seeing any difference as a function of us *and* them: difference just "is," it is not inherently good or bad.

A very open, almost aggressive, consulting audit partner in a financial services client team was confused by the behavior of her audit subordinate, a newly minted C.A./C.P.A. who had recently emigrated from Hong Kong. He initially appeared to agree with an approach the partner suggested, but then she learned from a third party that he was "refusing" to follow through. The partner confronted the auditor with the inconsistency, and was pleased when he reconfirmed his cooperation during the meeting. The project was started as planned. However, soon rumors circulated that the auditor had balked again.

This time, rather than storming in and confronting her teammate right away, the partner stopped and tried to see things from his point of view. She knew that he was very highly respected for his auditing skills and his work with clients—it was easy to forget that, with all the strife of the past couple of weeks—but the team wasn't benefiting. What was going on? She finally realized that very different modes of communicating were operating here. Her map of American versus Hong Kong Chinese culture reminded her that Americans expect open discussion, even with difficult topics. Consistent with this, she was being open with her subordinate. On the other hand, the Chinese culture tends to deal with negative communication in an indirect manner to retain the face of everyone involved. The Hong Kong manager felt insulted and threatened by what the American thought was "straight talk." He removed himself from the offensive situation by saying he agreed to do something he had no intention of doing. In his own culture, he wouldn't be expected to keep his word because it was obtained only by what he experienced as coercion. Instead, he expressed his real intentions only in highly indirect ways—which would have been clear to anyone in his own culture.

Trying to salvage the team, the partner invited the manager to a meeting. She planned it off-site and during lunch to remove the formality of the work setting, and to save face for her Chinese subordinate. After about half an hour of what the partner defined as "small talk," but which she understood was important in Chinese cultures for building and reinforcing the relationship, she apologized for not listening to him and for forcing her own solutions on the group. She described her understanding of the communication problem, being careful not to blame either one of them, but simply to explain it as an unfortunate situation arising from their different backgrounds—a situation she thought they should try to resolve for the good of the team and the firm. He had been blaming himself for the problem, and he was frustrated with his inability to say things in a way she could understand. In this setting, and with both people prepared to bridge their differences, they were able to decenter and suspend judgment. The partner asked the auditor to describe what he saw as the pitfalls in the project. She was amply rewarded for her efforts: he brought up several important issues that would have caused enormous problems later if they weren't addressed now.

Decentering is a skill, not just something people either can or can't do. Everyone can learn to see things from others' perspectives, particularly with the help of good maps, and can learn to suspend judgment. Team members can increase decentering in the team by questioning, paraphrasing, and openly testing themselves during interactions with other team members. When a team first works together, or first starts using its differences productively, decentering is time-consuming. But the time spent more than returns its investment as the team's work progresses. And the time needed to decenter shrinks as the team improves its skills at bridging.

Recenter: Span the bridge

Recentering, the third step to building a good bridge, is finding or developing shared ground upon which to build a new basis of interacting. This process, too, depends on having a good working knowledge of the team's internal differences. First you decenter—get out of your own mode of operating and into other people's modes—then you reconnect, with a very different way of communicating than before. Teams need shared ground around two things for good bridging: defining the situation itself, and interacting with each other.

For example, what is a meeting for? The definition differs widely, depending on whom you talk to. In the United States, a team meeting is held to make decisions. Members bring information and input to the meeting, and come prepared to compare and analyze alternatives in a constructive way. In Japan, a team meeting is held to publicly confirm decisions that were discussed among members in smaller groups as they developed their analyses. This intensive discussion among members explores issues just as thoroughly as the American model does, but saves face by ensuring that conflict is private rather than public. In Mexico, a meeting is a time to build relationships and trust with each other. Once you trust someone, then decisions can be made easily in other ways. In the Netherlands, a meeting may be a time to identify all the weaknesses and criticisms of a particular approach or plan: "Why bother talking about what's good? Those things don't need to be changed." Think about how much we take for granted that everyone has the same assumptions about what meetings are for. If there's this much variation in how to define a meeting, think about how to define the team's task! Recentering provides this common ground.

Members of a global team should explicitly agree on some common definitions of their own situation and the team's purpose. What kind of a team is this? Can we question the company's strategy, or should we take it as given? Should we evaluate projects based purely on potential net income, or do we have a budget restriction or other constraints to take into account? How soon do we need to see a return? What makes a proposal acceptable? What makes a presentation to senior management good? When a team is homogeneous, it's fairly safe to assume after a few brief exchanges that everyone's on the same footing. But the more diverse the team is, the more important it is to keep revisiting these issues.

Teammates should also agree on how to interact with each other. This is another place where diverse teams often begin to fall apart. Destroyer teams tend to dismiss or ridicule each other's norms, and then members on the receiving end withdraw from the interaction. Equalizer teams manage to agree on a set of norms for everyone without much anguish: they just use the norms of the majority or dominant group. But the best creator teams find a way to agree out loud that different members can operate under different norms. Recall the financial services team, where the Hong Kong Chinese auditor and American partner had difficulty communicating with each other. Understanding their differences helped the situation but didn't prevent the problem from happening again. Recognizing the importance of their communication to the team, they finished their long lunch meeting by discussing how to keep the lines open with each other. The partner agreed to check in with the auditor privately on a regular basis, and to try to listen for those indirect signals of disagreement and follow up on them tactfully. "I can't say I'll catch everything," she told him, "but I'll try to get better at it." The auditor agreed to try to speak up when he disagreed during a meeting, or at least to write it down and get it to the partner right away. He also told the partner that when he disagreed with her, his senior, he probably broke eye contact or switched topics, warning her that these were classic avoidance strategies to follow up on. And—critical to their ability to work together—both agreed not to interpret the other's actions as trying to undermine the team or other team members.

Integrating to Leverage Differences

Although good bridging is critical, understanding each others' perspectives doesn't guarantee that the group can bring everything together and come up with good decisions. For that, the team needs to integrate, our third principle of managing diversity well. Integrating is where understanding (from mapping) and communicating (from bridging) get converted into productive results. There are three important steps to integrating: managing participation, resolving disagreements, and building on ideas. All three require good mapping and bridging.

Manage participation for basic leverage

Any team needs to have high quality raw material—ideas from team members—from which to build great performance. You can't get good ideas from team members if they don't participate in some active way in the team's ongoing dialogue and discussion. Unfortunately, this is much more difficult than it sounds. People with different cultural values tend to subscribe to vastly different norms for participating. It may seem unreasonable to suggest, as we did above, that the group encourage different norms for participation from different people. It can take more time, and certainly takes more energy. But consider the consequences of enforcing similarity on participation modes.

Losing the assets. A very culturally diverse team of top managers from the downtown offices of a national bank were reviewing their decision-making. One of the managers spoke up and said, "Actually, I think we've been very good. We listen to everyone, we always make sure we ask if anyone disagrees with where we're going. And we're doing better than our competitors are here, so we must be doing something right!"

Another concurred, saying "I think you're right. There's obviously always room for improvement, but all things considered, we get all the right ideas out from everyone, right gang?" The rest of the group nodded, and several others gave supporting examples. After a few minutes of self-congratulation, the team was ready to move on to something else when one woman, originally from Korea, cleared her throat nervously and raised her hand tentatively. She was sitting at the back corner of the large square table, where she was easily overlooked by those leaning forward into the discussion. "Oh—Judy. Did you want to add something before we go on to other things?"

Judy took a deep breath and said: "Not one of you understands how hard it is for me to talk in meetings with you. I have to rehearse everything I'm going to say fifteen times in my mind. My throat gets tight, and I feel like I have to yell. I have to keep telling myself that no matter how wrong it seems, you don't think I'm being rude. Half the time by the time I say my piece, you think you've gone beyond the point, and my information doesn't get considered, and I don't absorb anything for the next minute after I've spoken. I've learned to cope so you really don't know I'm going through this, and my feelings aren't the point here. But do you think I can *think* properly under all that? What frustrates me most is that *the team really isn't getting my best ideas*, the ones that could make a difference!"

About 20 seconds into the shocked and awkward silence after Judy's statement, one of the men—who had not taken part in the previous conversation—stated quietly that as an Indonesian he also had difficulty speaking up in the group. He often had observations that the group didn't come around to until later, but he just hadn't found a way to speak up enough to get others to listen to him. By adjusting their team norms on participation to include Judy and others, the team could generate a wider scope of ideas to draw from.

In contrast, in much of both North and South America it is not only acceptable to speak openly aloud, it is expected that people will interrupt whenever they feel it is important, and that there will be little or no silence. We have watched members of these cultures try hard not to keep talking or interrupting during a meeting, to no avail. Even after watching themselves on videotape and expressing astonishment at how much they dominated the dialogue, when "caught in the moment" of a good discussion they simply could not hold back. They were extremely uncomfortable with silence, feeling a need to fill it. In their attempts to try to conform to other norms, they became as frustrated and uncomfortable as the East Asian managers in the example above, with the same results.

Tools and techniques. There are many ways of managing participation well. A global chemical R&D team, recognizing the strong cultural differences among members, assigned one member the role of "process leader." This person was given explicit license and *obligation* to curb the dominance of any individual, interrupt those talking freely on behalf of more reserved members hesitant to interrupt, and invite participation from members who were more silent. Team members also agreed to make a special effort never to interrupt certain individuals, but agreed that it was still okay to interrupt others. The process leader became especially helpful in managing meetings held over conference call, where visual cues for conversation norms are absent. The team's meetings became much more productive. Eventually, the process leader role was rotated through the group. Although the group needed the process leader's interventions less and less frequently, the very fact that they knew someone was monitoring the processes helped them interact more comfortably.

A second solution is to vary the modes of meeting and sharing information. This allows everyone to contribute in the way in which he or she is most comfortable, and ends up leveraging everyone's strengths. For example, the new president of a U.S. multinational's Asia–Pacific subsidiary found it difficult to get his diverse team of country managers to participate in U.S.-style meetings. He began to solicit detailed e-mails about the topic before the meeting. "What are your ideas?" he would ask. To his surprise, he received very thoughtful responses from those who had been most quiet during the past meetings. He tried to deliberately bump into team members in the hall or cafeteria, and chat with them about the issues. He also encouraged them to do the same with each other, and to share the outcomes of their discussions with him. He kept in frequent contact with the team members over the phone, and again encouraged them to do the same with each other. He also began to vary modes of participating when the whole group met together. He encouraged members to talk to each other "on the side" briefly, then asked one to summarize their discussion for the rest of the group. This was particularly effective when he paired people who both spoke the same non-English language, but one spoke stronger English than the other. He began to find that he was able to get insights from those not fluent in speaking English that he would never have received otherwise. He held frequent breaks, but requested that everyone stick around and chat with each other during at least some of those breaks. Even though it seemed to take more time on a day to day basis, he found that meetings went more quickly and were more productive, more than making up for the lost time. Of course, he got better ideas. But more than that, he found that broadening the scope of the team's interaction was beneficial to everyone, not just to those who were uncomfortable with the dominant modes. Greater trust was developed, better ideas started flowing, and the team was more committed to the solutions they generated together.

Each team must develop its own techniques for managing participation. Having a process leader and varying the modes of gathering information and meeting are particularly strong techniques because they allow flexibility and adaptation. Almost all creator teams we have seen incorporate both of these ideas.

Resolve disagreements to increase leverage

Once ideas are out, disagreements about them inevitably follow. To use the ideas, or to develop even better ones, it's necessary to resolve conflict. In teams where members are similar, people use their common set of rules regarding how to express, detect and resolve conflict. In diverse teams, as you might expect, the processes are a lot more complicated. Resolving the conflict becomes much more difficult when there is disagreement about how to resolve conflict in the first place.

Teams that become adept at mapping, bridging and participating find that their worst conflicts—the personal ones—diminish and become manageable. Mapping helps members anticipate and detect conflict in its early stages, before it becomes destructive. It also helps members understand the source of the conflict when it arises. Bridging well ensures that disagreements don't arise because of miscommunication, and generates high levels of trust and comfort among team members. When disagreements *do* arise, decentering provides a way to talk about the problems without blaming one another, and in a more objective way using each other's preferred modes of interacting. When participation is managed well, information is introduced when it is needed, rather than after conflict has already arisen. What is left is truly substantive, and can be resolved constructively. This is where having a process leader, whether it's the team's senior decision-maker or someone else on the team, really helps.

Wait! Some conflicts are hidden! In the earlier section about mapping, we cited an example of a team of petroleum executives from the U.S., U.K., Uruguay, Japan, and Belgium who were working on an acquisition. In that case, their disagreement about the relative priority to be given to financials versus staffing the top team was open and explicit. But later in their deliberations, the British member stood up, went to the flip chart and wrote in bold letters, DO NOTHING! "In my view," he said, "this academic 'straw man' is finally worth following. We are far from ready to do a deal. The financials are all wrong, and they aren't ready to compromise. We should move on and look for another potential acquisition."

He paused for a reaction. No one spoke and he was about to resume his argument when the Japanese executive, who had remained silent throughout the first 45 minutes of the discussion, cleared his throat and said, "Wait." He, too, was greeted with silence. Expecting elaboration from his Japanese colleague, the British manager waited with his pen poised. But after a brief moment the Japanese manager failed to add anything further and the U.K. manager stroked boldly through his earlier phrase and rewrote under it, WAIT. And he proceeded to explore other potential targets for acquisition.

Later that evening one of the two Americans on the team, nicknamed Tex, asked his Japanese counterpart over dinner why he had said, "Wait." Tex noted, "I expected you to continue and provide a counterargument, or elaborate in some way. Did you really mean, 'Do nothing,' as Ian seemed to conclude?"

"Not at all," replied Yoshi-san, "I meant that we should continue to collect more information about the company, check on the reasons for their executives being so rigid about the valuation, and wait a bit longer to see if the circumstances might change their bargaining position."

"But why didn't you say so?" asked Tex with a slight edge of frustration. "You didn't ask," replied Yoshi-san simply.

Here we have the most difficult of conflicts, one in which at least one of the parties assumed agreement, whereas the other chose not to raise the differences any more openly than he had. In the absence of a good map to indicate that perhaps "Wait" was not the equivalent of "Do Nothing," Ian assumed similarity. Neither did any of the other members of the team understand that Yoshi-san, with a greater sensitivity to hierarchy, had deferred to the more senior Ian and Tex, waiting for them to invite him to elaborate.

In this case, Tex had picked up a subtle clue that the pause after Yoshi-san's "Wait" didn't quite seem to equate to agreement. And he learned that one of the most important parts of multicultural effectiveness is knowing what you don't know. In this case, it was the need to pay attention to differences in language and hierarchy, rooted in cultural values that are part of an easy-to-use framework. It was a lesson not missed by Tex, for in a later discussion about the acquisition he made a direct inquiry of Yoshi-san regarding his experience with a similar deal in Tokyo years before. Although he had not volunteered his knowledge until asked, once Tex invited his participation, Yoshi-san gave a 10 minute "core dump" of his memory about the deal, making a significant contribution to the group's decision about how to proceed.

Tools and techniques. There are several techniques a team can use to resolve conflicts in a way that both helps the company and reinforces relationships among team members. In the example above, the team shifted the focus from the conflict itself to questions that might contribute to or resolve the conflict. In other situations, the team may recenter again on broader or higher level objectives, or clarify the relationship among the various perspectives. Many disagreements arise because of uncertainty or equivocal information, and in these cases a productive technique is to identify a set of questions whose answers would help distinguish between possible solutions, and a list of further information needed. The team can then discuss how to answer the questions or obtain the information, and proceed to clarify the issues. Often, once the new information is brought to the discussion, the disagreement is resolved much more easily.

A multinational merger implementation team combined several of these techniques when they had strong disagreements about how to consolidate the head offices and subsidiaries. Upon exploring the reasons for their conflict, they realized they had different assumptions about people's reactions, abilities to work together, and subsequent consequences. They had previously reviewed these differences in the early stages of the team's development, but in the heat of the discussions had forgotten their previous mapping. Once they resurfaced these differences, the team designed a decision tree with a set of contingency plans based on the probability of different events occurring, and agreed which path would be taken under which circumstances. Although this process took some time, the team was able to respond quickly and effectively to changes and reactions when they unrolled the implementation, and the process went much more smoothly than people in the two companies had anticipated.

There is no magic formula to make conflict disappear, and what we know about teams would suggest that cognitive conflict, or task-based conflict, is actually very helpful. For a diverse team, the important thing is to keep the task in mind and avoid personal conflict, and to find ways to bring all the perspectives out and discuss them. Perseverance becomes critical.

Build on ideas for optimal leverage

The final step to integrating is building on ideas. This should be familiar to anyone who has taken team building training. But as with other aspects of working in diverse teams, when dealing with differences—especially those hidden from our awareness—it is easier said than done. As in the case of the Latin American who tried to raise the issue of how to staff a merged company, it is easier to reject others' ideas when we misunderstand them or miss their intent. Both these errors are more likely in situations where differences get in the way.

One helpful thing to do is to see individual ideas as only the starting point for discussion. Everyone needs to be able to let go of idea ownership, and grasp onto idea generation on behalf of the team. At the end of a good meeting, it is often impossible to remember who initiated which idea. The petroleum merger meetings described above ended with this outcome, after Tex had incorporated Yoshi-san and the Uruguayan into the discussion. Another way to avoid premature closure on ideas is to set up a stage of activity where divergent thinking is encouraged *before* ideas are screened out. Team-building veterans will recognize variants of this in brainstorming, Delphi technique, and nominal group technique (NGT).

A good rule of thumb to follow is to resist the temptation to compromise. We are often tempted to "split the difference," or to say, "I'll give in this time, but you owe me one," especially when under time pressures. Neither is effective in producing synergistic ideas. Understanding differences and trying to bridge them encourages more productive means of engagement. If I try to understand your ideas and ways of thinking and behaving, my own repertoire of ideas and behaviors will be expanded. And by entertaining your approaches with fuller understanding, I am more likely to see new possibilities emerge from our interaction.

A financial-services global client team deliberately built on ideas as they developed account strategies. Encouraged by their improved understanding of each other's differences, they generated powerful ideas that helped the clients and the team. One new idea they surfaced was using the map of differences developed within their team to understand the key decision-maker *inside the client's organization.* They then framed their approach (decentering) with his preferences as a guide. Using the MBI principles to help facilitate relations between the team and others works with internal customers, too. The global resource team charged with cutting costs knew they had to start the rollout of their new processes inside the Japanese subsidiary. So, they brought in a colleague who had worked with the head of the Tokyo office to help them build an effective cultural map and plan their implementation.

Evolving to Keep Performance High

MBI is a set of principles for developing a unique team's own best way to perform well. It does not prescribe one best way for every team. That may have worked in yesterday's homogeneous workforce, but it doesn't translate to sustained performance today, and especially not globally. Every team is different, and every team needs to operate differently to capture the potential offered by its members. The appropriate map, communication norms, and integration styles will be unique to each team. Finding or developing them lifts a diverse team from destroying, carries it over the equalizers, and places it squarely among the creators.

To sustain this level of performance, teams need to examine their processes regularly and adapt to new members, new situations, and the general development of the team. In short, the team must *evolve*. For example, the management team of a global supplier-customer alliance met in person only once every three months. Between these meetings they interacted over e-mail, phone, and conference call. They thought the process issues were important enough, though, that they set aside at least one hour of every face-to-face conference agenda to address, "How are we managing ourselves? What could we be doing better to facilitate the team?" During this time they candidly reviewed the past months' communications, resolved miscommunications, and identified ways they could improve things in the future. This alliance was the best performing of many alliances engaged in by both companies, and the managers transferred the best practices learned here into other projects.

An excellent way to assess processes is to videotape the group during an important decision-making meeting. As uncomfortable as many people are with this at the beginning of taping, they soon forget the camera's rolling. The insights are always tremendous, and debriefing discussions immediately result in improved processes among team members. As one American remarked, "I couldn't believe how even my physical movements dominated the table, while Ron [a Filipino American], without us even noticing, actually worked his way off-camera within the first five minutes, and we never saw or heard from him again. But we know he's had the most experience with this type of decision!" This manager took on "learning not to dominate but to facilitate" as a personal learning goal for the rest of the project, and was a key to unlocking the team's final success.

When time is short or the team members are already well versed with the MBI principles, simply taking a few minutes to debrief a meeting—using MBI to frame the discussion—can bring up the most relevant points. It also gets the team into the important habit of thinking consciously about processes.

With this attention to processes, even as the team's mandate, membership, or environment changes, the team can adapt and develop new modes of operating. The team can evolve, changing how teammates work together and creating value for the company.

BUT ISN'T THIS JUST "COMMON SENSE" FOR ALL GROUPS?

The short answer is, "Yes." The more accurate answer is, "Yes, but. . . " Our research and research conducted by others shows that both culturally diverse and homogeneous groups can improve their constructive behaviors over time, achieving increases in performance. But the difficulties are greater the more diverse the group is, and the negative impact of ineffective behaviors on performance is much greater for diverse groups. Most important, the different perspectives on a diverse team offer more potential for becoming a creating team, so diverse teams stand to benefit much more from these processes. Because cultural differences usually present the most difficult case for teams, they also offer the greatest opportunities for value.

The second "but" is that these processes take time and effort to learn. Finding and using a good map, for example, is often difficult for team members to do on their own. Learning to decenter and recenter are difficult when you can't step out of the context and watch yourself objectively. Negotiating new norms and then abiding by them can be tiring. For some teams, and even for diverse teams doing some more straightforward or structured tasks, all this effort simply may not be worth it.

But for diverse teams working on high stakes projects or on those requiring unique, innovative solutions to complex dilemmas, the MBI processes pay off well. Like the creator team described in Appendix A, these teams can avoid destroying or equalizing, and can create that elusive synergy by understanding their differences, communicating across their differences, and managing their differences. Diverse teams are a reality of today's global workforce. Companies should begin to go beyond struggling with diversity's barriers to performance and use these opportunities to create value.

APPENDIX A MAPPING CULTURE

According to the Cultural Orientations Framework, based on anthropological theories developed in the 1950s and 1960s, every society must address a limited set of issues concerning interaction among people and with the environment. There is a limited set of typical responses to each issue, and every individual prefers one or sometimes two responses over the others for each issue. Most people who grew up in the same society tend to have the same set of preferences, but not always. For example, most Americans prefer individualism over collectivism over hierarchy for relationships, but many Americans are more collective than individualistic. *No one response is better than the others in all situations.* The best solutions to a company's most complex problems will inevitably incorporate a variety of these perspectives.

The five most important issues and their corresponding typical responses are listed in the table here. More information can be obtained from the resources listed in the selected bibliography.

Mapping Your Own Cultural Orientations

For each of the main issues, decide which response best fits with your perspectives and priorities, which fits second best, and which least fits how you approach the issue. For example, for "activity," if in most circumstances you like to take action quickly and work to achieve tangible goals, you are usually impatient with long, drawn-out decision-making, but become outright frustrated with spontaneous and "gut-level" decision-making, you would rank your activity choices as "doing" over "thinking" over "being." Of course, no one prefers the same response across all situations. But almost everyone does have a stable ranking of responses they tend to rely on, and most cultures also have a clear ranking of responses.

Mapping the Team's Cultural Diversity

Have everyone in the team map his or her own culture, and then compare your maps. Use your similarities and differences to understand how you've worked together in the past. Try to think of a meeting in which some people thought their ideas were being dismissed, or some people wanted to incorporate things that didn't make sense to others, or some people dominated or stayed quiet while others thought this wasn't appropriate. How can these situations be understood better given the cultural information you now have? What did you miss then, that would have helped your interactions? How could you have used the different perspectives to help you perform better in the past?

Then, as you move forward and engage in other meetings, try to bring out cultural explanations for your differences in approach whenever you can. Incorporate what you know about your cultural differences (mapping) into bridging and integrating processes. After a while, you'll find yourself anticipating some of these differences, and even encouraging the different perspectives so you can incorporate them into your team's decision making and processes.

APPENDIX B
CREATOR TEAM IN ACTION

We recently witnessed a consulting services team in Hong Kong that has evolved to use their cultural diversity to full advantage. They had completed a cultural mapping of their differences and knew that the mix of American, Italian, Anglo-Australian, Korean-Chinese-Australian, Cantonese, and Singaporean members meant a rich potential for synergy as well as for misunderstanding.

Recently, Franco, the Italian leader of the team, requested that Sheila, the Anglo-Australian marketing manager, and Tan Swee Ling, the Singaporean accounting manager, follow up with a major supplier over the Cantonese vendor's shortfalls in the two critical areas of marketing and accounting. Several days after the Cantonese contact assured Sheila and Swee Ling that the problems would be quickly resolved, major difficulties in both areas interfered with the consulting firm's customer relations.

Tan Swee Ling had made multiple requests for corrections on the errors, but the vendor had not responded. Frustrated by this inattention, Franco decided to write an e-mail directly to C.K., the Cantonese manager of the vendor. Knowing that he needed to modify his normally intense style of confrontation, he started his letter of complaint with thanks for the earlier discussions with Sheila and Swee Ling. He then continued with a carefully worded statement describing customers' complaints about the vendor's services. He took special care to preserve face for C.K., while still indicating the areas needing to be corrected.

APPENDIX A

The Cultural Orientations Framework

Issue 1: Relationships among People.
What basic relationships among people are most natural and/or most effective? Who is everybody responsible for, who must be taken care of, and who must everyone obey and be accountable to?

Response 1: Collective	Response 2: Hierarchical	Response 3: Individualistic
Oneís major responsibility is to and for a larger group such as extended family or peer group. In effective teams and organizations, individual contributions are not identified, and roles and responsibilities are highly fluid.	Interaction is most effective when there is unequal distribution of power and responsibility. Those higher in the hierarchy have power over and responsibility for those lower.	Oneís major responsibility is to and for oneis self and immediate family. In effective teams and organizations, individual contributions are identified and each person has a specific role and set of responsibilities.

Issue 2: Relationship to Environment.
What kind of relationship do we have with the world around us? How do we see ourselves in relation to the world around us? What is our role with respect to the world around us?

Response 1: Harmony	Response 2: Mastery	Response 3: Subjugation
We are not separate from our environment, but are part of it. Organizational problems are best resolved by adjusting elements in a large system to achieve and maintain balance over the big picture and long term.	We can and should control our environment. Organizational problems are best resolved by identifying which elements to change, and then changing them. If you control the environment, you will have fewer problems.	There is a large element of our environment that we cannot and should not control. We should not jump to make changes before we see if the problem can work itself out, or before waiting to see how the problem fits into a larger plan outside of our control.

Issue 3: Mode of Activity.
What mode of activity best suits interdependence and interaction in our society? How should we engage in activity, and how should we count on others to act?

Response 1: Being	Response 2: Doing	Response 3: Thinking
Teams and organizations function best if we do everything in its own time. We should identify broad goals and adapt them as circumstances arise, and should conduct work and move towards goals as seems appropriate at a given time. It is important to enjoy the process.	Teams and organizations function best if we set agendas with specific goals, constantly strive to achieve those goals, and continually engage in productive work.	Teams and organizations function best if we approach everything we do with great deliberation and rational thought, and with a great deal of attention to detail. We should not act until we are certain we are doing the best thing.

Issue 4: Human Nature.
What is the basic, underlying nature of humans? Is human nature (a) essentially good or evil; and (b) basically changeable or not?

Response A1: Good	Response A2: Evil	Response B1: Changeable	Response B2: Unchangeable
Assumption that humans are essentially good; if they do bad things, it is an anomaly or because of forces in the environment. People should be trusted at first.	Assumption that humans are essential evil; if they do good things it is because they are consciously trying to overcome their nature. People should not be trusted until they have earned the trust.	A personís basic nature can change. If a person is essentially good now, he or she can change to become essentially evil, and vice versa.	A personis basic nature cannot change. A person who is good now will always stay good, and vice versa.

Issue 5: Time.
How do we think about time? What role does it play in our decision-making and day-to-day life?

Response 1: Past	Response 2: Present	Response 3: Future
We should have a strong respect for tradition and our past. In making decisions, we should rely strongly on what has worked in the past.	We should be interested in our past only as it helps us understand today. Todayís needs are most important, and the short-term future should also be considered.	We should be interested in the past and present only in how they have potential to affect the long-term future. We should easily sacrifice things today to benefit the long-term future.

Because both Sheila and Swee Ling had been involved in the issues, he saved the e-mail into a file and gave a copy to each of them, requesting that they review it "for accuracy and tone." A few minutes later Sheila came back to him waving the piece of paper.

"Well! She will hardly know you are concerned, with this wording!" she exclaimed.

Franco replied, "I'm actually pleased with your reaction. I wanted it to be calmer than I feel. I'm sure that she will get the message, but I tried to be more subtle than my usual bluntness, given the cultures of the people involved."

After waiting for two hours, Franco approached Swee Ling's desk. "I really wanted to send that e-mail out to C.K. before we leave. Have you had a chance to look at it, Swee Ling?" he asked.

Swee Ling was surprised, "Oh, since it was an e-mail, I thought you had already sent it," she replied.

Franco said, "No, that's why I asked for your input. What did you think?" Swee Ling gave a look that suggested disapproval, but she also showed her usual hesitation. "Come on, come on," Franco urged, "Spit it out. What do you think?"

"Don't send it!" she finally admitted. "Just don't send it."

Franco fell apart laughing and called Sheila over to Swee Ling's desk. "How typical of you two!" and he went on to explain the sharp differences in their interpretations. Inviting them into his office, Franco said, "OK, Swee Ling, Sheila thought the e-mail was too understated and you are telling me not to send it. What's going on?"

Swee Ling replied with her usual indirect answer. She indicated that it was better for C.K. to respond to the company's concerns because she wanted to, rather than because she had to. Franco replied with his usual impatience, noting that he had softened his approach so much that Sheila had objected that C.K. would miss the point of his dissatisfaction. He noted that he had deliberately omitted sending a copy to C.K.'s boss, whom he knew well, wanting to save face for her. After more discussion Swee

Ling continued to strongly advise that Franco not send the memo. But she didn't suggest any alternatives. Finally, Franco asked her if it would make sense for him to send the e-mail directly to Swee Ling and ask *her*—Swee Ling—to follow up.

"Perfect! That's O.K. to do," came the quick answer from Swee Ling.

An hour after rewording the memo so it was appropriate for its new recipient, he emailed it to Swee Ling. To his utter amazement, in another hour a startling e-mail appeared on his own screen from C.K. It was directed to several members of her company involved in the issues of concern and was copied to her boss, Franco, Sheila, and Swee Ling. It was extremely blunt and told her staff on no uncertain terms that she had received a fax from Franco complaining about items that must be corrected immediately.

Now Franco was really confused. He hadn't sent a fax to her at all, and the tone of the email from C.K. to her staff was highly authoritarian and harsh. What was going on? He sought out Swee Ling, who had just read her copy of the e-mail and was smiling broadly.

"Well, *that* certainly worked out as we wanted it to!" she chuckled.

"Yes, but *how*???" Franco laughed. "What happened? I didn't send a fax, and my message was to you, not to her. What's going on?" he repeated.

Swee Ling explained. "I called her and told her that you had sent me a note with concerns and had asked me to follow up. We talked some about the issues, and she asked me to send her a fax of your note. After she got it, we talked some more, and she said not to worry and that she would resolve it. Her copying her boss and indicating that your letter was stronger than it really was, enabled her to show her own strength in solving the problems for you. And she did it her way!"

Here is a team that used its cultural diversity to full advantage. They had a good understanding of their own differences *(mapping)* and of the need to consider the different approaches of the vendor (*decentering).* Franco involved his own team members *(building participation*) initially in checking his wording *(decentering*) and later *in recognizing and resolving the conflict* between his approach and Swee Ling's advice. The reworded and redirected documents are examples of both *building on others' ideas* and *recentering*. The outcome not only accomplished what Franco wanted and needed, but raised Swee Ling's status in the group and provoked a discussion that caused the team to learn even more. The performance turned out to be higher in both the outcome with the vendor and the development of the team. What more could one want?!

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