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Session One: Bridging Across Cultures

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Moderator: Dr. Bernd Fischer
Speakers: Rene Insam & Helmut Buss

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I. BIOGRAPHIES

Bernd Fischer is currently teaching Applied Global Diplomacy at Chapman University and Modern History at the University of La Verne. He retired from a thirty-seven-year career in the German Foreign Service in June 2015. In his role as German consul general in Los Angeles, he sought to foster and deepen German-American relations and lectured at prestigious universities on Germany's reunification and the important role it plays in the European Union. He holds a doctorate in philosophy from Heidelberg University and was a Fulbright Fellow at the University of Arizona. Key posts of his foreign service career include German ambassador to the Republic of Croatia, head of the Economic Department at the German embassy in Washington, deputy ambassador in Tokyo, Japan, and service in the Permanent Mission of Germany to the United Nations in New York, as well as various positions at the German Foreign Office headquarters in Bonn and Berlin. Fischer also coauthored the German book *Zwischen Wilhelmstrasse und Bellevue: 500 Jahre Diplomatie in Berlin* in 1998, an overview of the history of foreign diplomacy in Berlin.

Rene Insam, Culture Specialist, U.S. Loyalty, American Express, has been a long-time student of different cultures, having spent more time of his life in different countries abroad than in his native Germany. He holds a Bachelor's degree in Cultural Studies from Passau University in Germany. In 2005, he moved to the United States to earn his MBA with a focus on organizational culture change from Western Michigan University. Insam is currently a doctoral candidate in the field of Organizational Leadership, researching organizational and national culture management in merger and acquisition events. He has over ten years of experience working on large IT projects in the financial services industry. After stints with Deutsche Bank and Wells Fargo, Insam has been with American Express for the past five

137

years. He has recently been working on the team that launched Plenti—the first-ever loyalty coalition program in the U.S. As part of his responsibilities, he oversees the organizational and national culture integration of a recently acquired German company. Rene is both a German and U.S. citizen.

Helmut Buss is the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) chief ombuds. Prior to his appointment as chief ombuds for ICRC, based in Geneva, Switzerland, Buss worked as ombuds for the United Nations Funds and Programmes (UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF, UNOPS, UN Women), based in New York. He started to work as an attorney before joining the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) over twenty-five years ago, where he assumed functions both at headquarters and in the field. Following a field assignment as associate protection officer in UNHCR's regional office in Dakar, Senegal, he assumed functions of legal officer, head of unit and regional training coordinator at UNHCR headquarters in Geneva. He then served as UNHCR country representative in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, before returning to Geneva to join UNHCR's Fundraising Service. Between 2003 and 2010, Buss headed UNHCR's Legal Affairs Section. Buss brings to the position extensive knowledge in conflict management and informal conflict resolution, both from his functions as legal counsel and experience in mediation. He holds a master's degree in mediation from the Institut Universitaire Kurt Boesch (IUKB) in Sion, Switzerland, and did extensive research on conflict cost controlling. *Measuring and Reducing the Cost of Conflict at Work in UNHCR* is the title of his master's thesis. He is a member of the International Ombudsman Association (IOA) and has participated in various IOA training activities. He also received certification as an ombuds from the IOA and is a certified Mediator from the Centre for Effective Dispute Resolution (CEDR). He holds a Law degree from Hamburg University and an MBA degree from the Open University Business School in the United Kingdom. He is a national of Germany, is married, and has two adult daughters.

II. Speaker Presentations[1]

Dr. Bernd Fischer: I am here to introduce a fabulous group of speakers, but first, I will introduce my own reflections about the topic. Before I continue, are there any students in the room? You are my favorite people. For your sake also, I will start a little bit theory. In diplomacy, which is a tough subject because it is comprises everything, there is an

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[1]. These presentation transcripts have been modified to conform to the compositional criteria of this Volume. For the complete video of these presentations, see Pepperdine University, *Pepperdine Law: Managing Conflict 4.0 – Session 1*, YOUTUBE (Nov. 25, 2015), https://youtu.be/VIdw_LVFrS4 [hereinafter Presentation One Video].

138

academic stride to develop a model. I have developed a model on applied global diplomacy and I take one element from this in the model because, for my sake, it fits in the conference. There is an outer circle, and that outer circle describes the diplomatic life cycle over thousands of years. You have to have some knowledge of history, which a diplomat automatically gets over his lifespan. Normally, it starts off at a point where diplomats interfere in this cycle – the cycle is: war, peace, war, peace, war, peace, war, peace. In this cycle, they enter normally at the point of conflict prevention, and then the cycle mostly continues because it is very difficult to keep a conflict from arriving, especially when you think in terms of 50, 100, or 200 years. That is the conflict. And then what follows is this: conflict management. So here we are. Managing Conflict 4.0 is basically our conflict management. You continue and continue until there is conflict resolution. This way, or that way. A good way, or bad way. Perhaps sometimes there is a moment of peace. But even then, you have to start again in preventing the next conflict. As such, conflict often can be prevented when the diplomat uses his three major skills.

The first major skill is to know the past, which I just mentioned. The second skill is to the present yourself as closely as possible. That requires two important things: intellectual clarity and truth. Don't lie to yourself and, if possible, work for a system that allows you to tell the way you see it. You wouldn't believe how many diplomats work for systems where that is not allowed. Luckily, the American and German systems allow it. The third skill is the most important. Young kids must learn that early training predicts the future. This applies not only to diplomats, but also people in this room and all other areas. Training how to predict the future is what makes you brilliant. It's what divides you from those who don't know how to predict the future. All I can say to you young kids: train, train, and train.

In an exercise I recently did with my students at Chapman, I asked them to predict the future in a negative sense. They were directed to write down their five biggest fears for the next five years, and their five biggest fears for the next eighty years. I gave them a hundred years each as the life span. It was fascinating what came out. Try this exercise with yourself and predict the future of German-American corporate relations, for example, at the end of this conference.

So now we finish the theoretical part and go into the practical part of my talk. For the practical part, I will give you a few examples, which basically are connected with the model. First, let's presume that I drive a Volkswagen Jetta but gas driven. This example is very topical. Within the context of conflict prevention, we are in the moment of conflict management. Let's also think of building bridges. A few miles northwest of us is Oxnard,

139

which is the biggest German emission exhaust-testing center for the entire Volkswagen Worldwide Group. So this not only includes Volkswagen, but also Porsches and BMWs. Because these tests are shared with the EPA and the body of air quality control, and since California has the highest standards, their approval allows them to sell all over North America. Eventually, the EPA asked the University of West Virginia to come over to evaluate the reports and do road tests here in the areas of Los Angeles, Hollywood Hills, and even around here at Pepperdine. That's when they came out with striking differences, and the scandal broke loose. That's the background.

What is the situation within the company? Volkswagen is a typical German company. They don't let people loose after a year or two. Instead, they work long-term together with a single company. Many of their employees have worked twenty or thirty years for the same company. Both older and younger employees intend to work with the company long-term. As such, before the scandal, Volkswagen employees from Oxnard and the surrounding region would go tell all their friends and families how great it was to work for Volkswagen. Now, after the scandal, they say things about how the Volkswagen management cheated, and so forth. These employees, including bosses and management, go through such public hell that conflict management is necessary.

Their boss manages it in a wonderful way. He is a good friend of mine so I know that he doesn't mind if I share this with you. He totally saw conflict arise with everybody, and even saw it arise within himself because he found himself saying, "It was not me who had to check if there was something wrong with these diesels. What I got from the company was what I had to check, and I checked it." What he didn't know at the moment, of course, was that those cars were on these standing wheels for 10,000 miles on the spot, and then something happened with the software that created these fantastic results. And so the boss and the manager are in full solidarity and all the other workers. At the Oxnard plant, there are about ten German workers and about ninety American workers, so the hundred workers are sticking together. That's already the beginning of conflict resolution.

As a fan of Volkswagen, and a fan of the German car-manufacturing industry, and being a proud German, I predict that, in the end, Volkswagen will stand there bigger, better, and stronger than before, and everybody will trust them more than any other German car company. The CEO already resigned, which is a good sign that hopefully the next crisis will be prevented in a way that has the necessary checks and balances. That will be the most important in continuing conflict prevention.

My second example also comes from the auto industry. In the late Nineties, there was a marriage made in heaven. Mercedes and Chrysler got

140

together to become Daimler Chrysler. At first, they were happy. Zetsche, the former head of Chrysler, became the CEO for Daimler. At the time, I was the economic minister in Washington and often visited Daimler in Detroit. With each visit, Zetsche looked more and more depressed.

This is what happened: the culture between the Daimler bosses and the Chrysler employees just didn't match. The Daimler bosses wanted something, I'm sorry to be so blunt to you Americans, which the Chrysler people didn't want. And the word is very prudent now: quality. The Daimler people feared that if quality wasn't introduced on every level of the Chryslers, it would diminish the Daimler brand. It already started to happen to Mercedes, which hurt its brand because they had cross-fabrication. So Daimler worried how to create not only quality, but also control starting at all different levels. That includes a lot of training of the workers. It's not the engineers, it's not the lawyers, it's not the managers; it's the workers. Every German worker goes through a three and a half year apprenticeship system. Every single one. You don't get a German car made in Germany by a worker that has not gone through apprenticeship. I cannot describe to you how short the training was for a Chrysler worker. As a result, you never wanted buy a Chrysler that was built on a Monday or the end of the month. People would check when the car was completed, and if it was completed on a Monday or at the end of the month, then people would not buy it. This, along with other economic factors, led to the rupture. Now, Mercedes, BMW, and Volkswagen Chattanooga have introduced situations where people are suffering from a lack of apprenticeship training.

The German apprenticeship is three and a half years. For half of the week, you go to a school equivalent to a community college here. For the other half of the week, you are trained on the job by a professional trainer who is hired and paid by the company. The company also pays the school or community college fees. The company also certifies the professional trainer. And on top of all of that, a German Chamber of Commerce system requires an exam. So before you can work on a car, workers have to train for two years and pass two exams, one from the community college and one from the German Chamber of Commerce. They just won't let workers loose on the cars. When I had my Mercedes serviced in a dealership somewhere in this area, I always had two weeks where I had to worry. "What did they do with it? Hopefully nothing wrong." A lot of people can tell stories. But if you have proper training, it works. Why am I telling you all of this? If you ask German bosses all over the U.S. what there biggest problem with their workers is, they would say that they are as smart as our workers in Germany, but lack training.

141

Third, and the last point: Americans complain that German workers take too many vacations. They never complained about the quality of the German workers, but Germans have lost the ability to work hard. Americans work hard. They work three jobs. Or three untrained jobs I should say? On the other hand, Germans work one job with six or seven weeks of vacation. Many say that's not so good for productivity. But that's just one complaint about work ethic. The complaint was the frequency of which Germans call in sick, that to seems to be a bit higher in Germany than here in America. Americans are tough. They go to work even when they're very sick. Germans, on the other hand, will justify symptoms differently. "I have a scratchy throat, it's Monday, and it could develop into something else. I better call in sick." Proactivity often happens, and it makes life tough. On the other hand, Americans don't have any issues with German unions. They are happy that the unions are there because they are part of the corporate structure in Germany. Half of the seats are unions. Unions take care that there is corporate responsibility of their members. As a result, we barely have any strikes. It is a real major problem.

So I mentioned three problems that are all in the area of managing conflict. While some of these problems involve Managing Conflict 1.0, they all need 4.0 knowledge. Therefore, Tom and Alexander, I applaud you so much for giving these skills to the audience here, and hopefully many more, on how to manage conflict when a conflict has arrived. There is a managing necessity for how to manage conflict properly and relate it to resolution.

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Rene Insam: Good Morning, I am excited to be here! I hope everyone enjoyed their breakfast. I was just saying to a few folks in the hallway that this is the healthiest breakfast I have had in a long time; there was no bacon. But I'll find that later. Culture and strategy is what I want to talk about today.

"Culture eats strategy for breakfast." This quote by Peter Drucker was certainly one thing that we experienced at American Express during our recent project. Who has heard of the Plenti Rewards Program? Plenti is the first loyalty coalition program in the United States. American Express acquired a Germany company for its know-how, its technology, and the product of a loyalty coalition that has been operating in Germany for over ten years. And our strategy was a pretty good one. We gave this t-shirt to everyone who had been working on Plenti [displaying a Plenti-logoed t-shirt that reads: "I was there."] Pretty simple. And this is what culture did to it. [Turns t-shirt around.] I hope everyone can see that these are crossed out launch dates. So I think that as long as we have one date on here that's not crossed out, we were successful. But we had to strike three of them. And

142

what happened between the front and the back of the t-shirt is what I want to talk about today.

Culture really is a leadership tool. We had to learn the hard way, but it is really a way of running the organization, if you are able to conduct a mind-shift from looking at culture as an obstacle, and understanding that, really, it is a resource. I want to give you some anecdotes and examples that I think will illustrate very well what we experienced and how surprised we were. We might have underestimated the culture gap that exists between a German and an American company; we're not talking about the U.S. and China, or the U.S. and Japan. This is the U.S. and Germany, so maybe we thought it'll work itself out.

My first example is starring Andreas, or Andy, one of our engineers in the Munich team. Andy speaks English very well. In fact, all Germans that we work with on the Munich team do, because English is a required subject in school and, as a result, all of these Germans have been learning English for probably nine years by the time they graduate high school. So Andy sets up these meetings with his engineers and his fellow engineers on the U.S. side. He handpicks five or six people that he wants to work with. Now, we have a practice at American Express: if we believe that others can benefit from the information that the meeting organizer shares in the early goings of a new project, we forward meeting invites to those other people. For example, if I think that Joe, Ben, and Bob can benefit from what is being said, I forward the invites to them, and they will just dial in and hear what Andy has to say.

Pretty soon Andy got upset about this practice and said, "I handpicked these four or five people for this working session. I really wasn't prepared to have Joe, Ben, and Bob on the call as well." And they might be people from the business side or Directors or Vice Presidents; in other words, people that Andy does not share context with. Secondly, guess when these meetings were set up? Simply because of the geographical distance, Andy, had to get on the call and speak a foreign language late into the workday, at five or six o'clock in the evening. Just think about it. When do you do your best work in the workday? Probably not at five or six o'clock in the evening. Meanwhile, in Phoenix it was nine o'clock in the morning and the other participants were ready to attack. "Let's go. Let's make some decisions. Let's get on the phone."

When we started to look into what the problems were, we understood that it's still a foreign language to our German colleagues, and the way they set up meetings was precisely to control the communication situation. For example, if I invite my fellow engineers, we've already built rapport. We talk everyday, we have the same language, and we have the same insights.

143

But if I know that there are three other people on the meeting invite now, it's going to get that much harder for me. I have to think in a foreign language about how I can make those thoughts accessible to other people. This can create a lot of stress and frustration. To make it a little easier for himself, Andy started putting all of what he wanted to say into emails. "Let's avoid the verbal communication situation, I'm just going to write an email and I'm going to write it over the course of the day." But the same circumstances that made it difficult to verbally communicate because of the time and language difference also contributed to the email barrier.

So when Andy was writing emails and sending them off, he was sending them away on a bridge that he could not see the end of. He wrote 2,000-3,000 word emails. You know how many words Americans read on average in a message? One hundred and forty characters. That's the length of a tweet. If I receive an email from Andy and it's 2,000 words long, first of all, I'm not going to read it right away. My day is way too busy for that. Second of all, once I get to read it, I notice he's laid out a whole decision tree with Option A and Option B. Further, there are three more sub-options, and the following message: "Rene, just tell me which way you want to go and send me your answer. When I get into the office tomorrow morning I will start working on it." That doesn't feel good to me. "Alright Andy, there is also Option C and D. You didn't even give me a chance for input." Right? And I'm not going to write 2,000 words back. So things didn't really get better with emails.

What's important to take away here is that no one is at fault for this problem. This is not because Andy wants to frustrate me with a long email. He probably knows he shouldn't write 2,000 word emails. I know I shouldn't eat the bacon for breakfast everyday. I do it anyways. We sometimes do things even though we know better. We are looking for the easy way out. These problems are circumstantial and, as Bernd already said, it's not so much the strategy. We can communicate strategy in town halls and round tables, and I think Americans Express has a great culture of making strategy known. But it's people and what they do every day. It's the meetings and the emails that build this culture wall. I do it every day. So many times that sooner or later I'm going to avoid this communication. I'm going to avoid the contact, I'm not going to read the emails, and I'm not going to dial into the meeting anymore. And this actually happened.

I think it's very, very important to recognize that culture is subconscious and emotional. You are on your own track, and whomever you are dealing with or working with might be on a completely different track. And even if you are aware of that, culture is so deeply ingrained in our subconscious, that it's nearly impossible to change it on purpose and on the spot. It requires a little bit of training. It requires a little bit of premeditation to do so.

144

I want to tell you one more anecdote. I was at my desk and one of our VPs came to me frustrated and at the end of her wits. She said, "I just got off a call with my German engineering team and they're not getting it. We've been trying to get this done for weeks but they're not moving on it. What's happening here?" I said, "Well let me dial into your next call. I want to see what's going on." Within five minutes of listening in, I understood that there were two things going completely wrong.

First, the question of what constitutes a decision on the U.S.-side was completely different from the understanding of decision making on the German side. It was very clear that from our perspective, we had made a decision and we were ready to start running. But the Germans were discussing details, fringe cases, in-depth analysis; they kept going on and on about details. They were not ready, from their perspective, to start running and to start implementing. That took the conversation into a direction that this VP never wanted it to go into. Secondly, the way that negative feedback is provided differs extremely between the U.S. and Germany: Americans love to keep good relationships with everyone and therefore, we bubble-wrap things. There will be three positive messages, then there will be the negative, but we don't want to leave it on that note. We're going to say that overall we're still doing great and are in great shape if we get this one thing done, but it's really minor. "Let's all be friends, we really like each other." Germans hang up the phone after that and they think everything is great. They throw a party at the Biergarten next door. I had that experience many times when I first started working in the United States. I expected more success a lot faster because I never heard any negative feedback about my performance.

I shared all this with the VP and I said, "These two things, next time you are on the call, just change these two things." She got the point. No problem. The next call happens, I listen in again, and she still couldn't pull it off. Culture is so deeply ingrained in us from an early, early age, that we cannot consciously break out of it. It was still bubble-wrapped negative feedback. We still go down the path of discussing the details as opposed to acknowledging that a decision was made long ago, and that it was time to start running. The power of culture is just overwhelming. So we felt like we had to come up with a blueprint. We needed to start managing this a little bit better. Like I said, I think we were good about acknowledging that there was opportunity to improve the way we collaborated.

We came up with a cultural management plan that really has three pillars: discovery, alignment, and cultivation. And you really don't need the first pillar if the plan is managed correctly. But we were in reactive mode so we needed a discovery phase. We didn't even understand where these

145

problems came from. We needed to do some root cause analyses and discover culture barriers in interviews with the people that were working together across borders. "What is your day like? What's upsetting you?" And we really had to set the stage with leadership support saying this is a safe zone. It's not about right or wrong. We made very clear that a lot of this was circumstantial and that it was not about bad-mouthing your German coworkers or American coworkers. So people started talking and we got all of these insights about the language barrier and email barrier. And we started to understand what was happening every day in the work-life of our people. One of the important points here is that one of the Germans, Sigi, actually said, "This is all good and great; that we are getting this out in the open. But you also have to consider that this is American Express, a global American-based financial services company working together with Payback, which is a much smaller, IT-centric, agile, and innovative company. There's got to be some organizational culture that's in the way of this as well. It's not just Germany and the U.S." We totally acknowledged that. We said, "Great point, Sigi. Let's do a culture survey that really just looks at organizational cultures so that we have root-cause analysis in both areas of national and organizational culture differences."

Once we had this done, we had a whole inventory of root-causes and we were in a great position to start talking about aligning our culture. "How do we want it to be?" And this is just an effort to guide interaction. We're not prescribing anything. Nobody gets penalized if they are not making clear in the email whether it's a knowledge-share and we are okay with forwarding the invite, or a working meeting and we want just people that were on the original invite. But that's a really easy trick to make clear what kind of meeting it is and whether we are okay with forwarding the invite. One more example: Americans love to put their bosses in cc of the email, just to keep them in the loop, just to tell them, "Hey, I'm working with Michael on the German side and I want to keep you informed of something." If anything, it's a good reflection of the Germans' help. But when I send an email to Germany and my boss is on it, it's an immediate escalation. On the German side it feels like, "Hey, give me a chance to work on this first. Why is your boss on this email? I didn't do anything wrong." But those words were never spoken. They were just felt. And if you just feel it everyday, your culture wall is going to build up and it's just going to get higher and higher, over the course of months and years even.

So we started to really look at these root-causes, came up with a list, and started to align how we can bridge these gaps, avoid these gaps, and become more proactive about it. Conflict prevention has been a key word that's been mentioned many, many times here already. That's the mode we wanted to get into. Because culture is established over such a long period of time, one change initiative was not enough. I think many times in business,

146

we do a change initiative and we want to re-freeze everything after we changed it. More often than not, the change initiative is lost. So we needed to cultivate this, and I think the American Express culture of being inclusive, like having Town Halls, round tables, brown bag lunches, workshops, and trainings, is very conducive to making this culture change last. And that's where we are now. We are somewhere between alignment and cultivation.

So to get away a little bit from our experiences at American Express, I think these stories make one thing clear: Even with allegedly similar cultures, there are no culture agnostic endeavors anymore. Think about your own business or organization. Your corporations, your teams, your products, your markets – it's been a globalized world for many, many decades now. There will be some aspect of internationality and of culture, be it organizational, be it national. You will have that.

This is not a new method, I'm sure, but I want to show you this graph real quick.[2]

So again this blueprint is probably the biggest takeaway here. It is about understanding the root cause of your cultural problems, be they national, or organizational, and there are many tools out there that are at your disposal to discover what's going on. Secondly, you need to align to what you want. And one important thing that we experienced at American Express is, "How do you phrase your strategy and your goals?" Language is the most important agent of culture. Which is why foreign language is such an obstacle to us.

But if you ask your people to do what you set forward, you need to be very, very good about phrasing it and going out to Accenture or KPMG – I'm sorry to say this – will cost you a lot of money. Nevertheless, the very shiny strategy statement is great and you want that. But if you are not paying attention to your culture, especially in an M&A position, it will undermine what you just paid for. Lastly, and I mentioned this, there has to be a long-term cultural management plan in place and you probably want to start appointing someone to be a culture lead. It can be a 50% role. I think it should be a 100% role, but you need someone that pays attention to your culture impacts. It will add value and cut your costs and increase your profits and it will build your brand. So lastly, and this is my closing slide here, ask yourself, are you thinking about culture as an obstacle, or are you thinking about culture as a resource? And what are you doing to harness culture as a resource? Thank you very much.

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2. For the visual discussion of this graph entitled, *How Well Correlated is Industry Profitability Across Countries*, see Presentation One Video, *supra* note 1, at 45:35.

147

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Helmut Buss[3]: Now, we are moving into a little bit of a different space, and that is the International Committee of the Red Cross. I salute a number of ombuds colleagues that are sitting in the room. But, of course, I also feel very privileged to be with all of you here because I really treasure this opportunity to learn. It is all about learning from each other. I very much hope that we can also benefit for the International Committee of the Red Cross from our conference here to help deal with conflict in the workplace a little bit better. The intention is to go very briefly through what the ICRC is doing and some challenges around bridging cultures. Also, I will cover what an ombudsman or ombuds office does in that space and how we are able to accompany bridging cultures. Then, I will go through some lessons learned from our experience.

So, just to get us into the space of the ICRC and its humanitarian mandate, let us go 150 years back in time to Northern Italy and the War of Solferino. There was a very important man named Henry Dunant, and Henry Dunant was a Swiss businessman and social activist. He was, by coincidence, in that part of the world in 1859, and witnessed the result of the war with hundreds of thousands of troops and tens of thousands wounded in the field. Nobody really cared for them. Dunant took the initiative with the local population to provide initial care for the wounded. After returning to Geneva, Dunant developed the idea that in the future a neutral organization should exist to provide care to wounded soldiers and, as a result, the ICRC was founded in 1863. The ICRC is now 150 years old and was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize three times. So this is an organization with a lot of tradition. Around the principles of impartiality and humanity, it is very Swiss still, with Swiss-only governance. Just to get us into this humanitarian space, I brought this film. [Shows film.[4]]

So the ICRC started very small as a very Swiss organization. In 1980, there were 700 staff total and all of them were Swiss nationals. Now, over the years the ICRC workforce grew substantially. Today we work across the globe with some 15,000 staff members. Today, the workforce is much more international, with only 30% Swiss nationals remaining. Let me illustrate the challenge of a transition from a very Swiss organization to an increasingly international workforce around two pictures. A non-Swiss Western European delegate who joined the ICRC twenty-five years ago told me that at that time she was called the Mars-Bar. She was told, "You are chocolate outside but not fully inside. So you are not fully Swiss." Many of

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3   The findings, interpretations, and conclusions expressed herein are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

4.   *See* Presentation One Video, *supra* note 1, at 57:40.

148

today's senior ICRC delegates, who have been in the organization for over twenty-five years, consider the ICRC as their family. Under the current transition process, in which the ICRC is becoming an increasingly international organization with a substantial increase of its workforce and a 60% budget increase over the last four years moving up to a budget now of $1.5 billion, it is difficult in particular for some senior staff members to continue identifying with the organization. Many senior colleagues feel that their "family" is being taken away from them and that the current transition risks changing the soul and the Swiss-ness of the ICRC. The transition and perceived transformation of the organization is part of the current challenge.

A couple of years ago, the ICRC decided to reflect the increased internationalization of its workforce by introducing the concept of "one global workforce," and I want to talk to you today a little bit about what that means and what the challenges are facing the ICRC in terms of cultural diversity and "getting cultures connected." Part of that challenge is to get "resident" (i.e., national) staff connected with "mobile" (i.e., international) staff; the difference being that resident (national) staff remains in their countries and mobile (international) staff moves between countries. A colleague in Africa the other day told me, "Helmut, in order to understand what the challenge is, I will give you the image of the mango field. Us locals are planting and watering the trees out here, and the internationals working in the ICRC are picking the fruit. And what is left for us is what falls to the ground." This is just an image of how difficult it is still to start talking about one global workforce. When we are looking at the cultural challenges that we are facing today in the ICRC, there are multiple layers. Nationality is only one. There are other levels, such as moving a structure that is divided into national and into international staff into one global workforce; moving from a feeling of family and belonging to more self-management; or moving from learning by doing to higher professionalization. So the organization is facing major changes and challenges and I am limiting myself in that description to those related to the move from a very Swiss to a multi-national culture.

Here are a few examples illustrating such cultural challenges. By way of example, the idea that "we will work it out" can be considered a very Swiss approach. Very conclusive, very participatory. "We'll find a way, we'll sort it out." In an organization that now requires a substantive support structure to administer a $1.5 billion budget and 15,000 staff, there is a need for more clarity, rules, and regulations. So that is a big cultural challenge for an organization that praises itself for its flexibility and consensus approach.

In illustrating cultural challenges, let me describe to you a situation that I recently saw visiting one of our Asian countries where we have an

149

operation. As an ombudsman, I went there and met a manager coming from a Western country who said to me, "I have instituted an open-door policy. But I don't get it. Somehow, the people are not connecting with me. They are even getting aggressive. They don't trust me." So what was happening? I talked to the colleagues and they said, "In our culture, you just don't speak up or criticize your boss. By implementing this open-door policy, he basically expects us to go against our own culture. He is not sensitive enough to our culture." This Western-European manager followed what he thought was best management practice and it turned out to be the completely wrong thing to do in an Asian culture context.

Another example is one I entitled, "What is your foot doing under mine?" The other day, I had an opportunity to talk with a colleague in South Sudan where some people had told me it was very difficult to negotiate. So I asked my colleague, "How do you solve your problems?" He replied, "Imagine walking down the street and, all of a sudden you realize that my foot is accidentally on top of yours. No one apologizes, we would just walk on, and you would find a way to hit back later, one way or the other."

Or listen to this story: The colleague in China that I met said, "I'm very happy that the ICRC is trying to get more equity through the introduction of the "one global workforce" concept. I'm looking forward to also becoming a mobile, international delegate for ICRC. There's only one problem: the Swiss do not know what neutrality means." So that colleague, in his frame of thinking in the political context of the country where he was living, framed neutrality in a different and somewhat reduced way and not necessarily in line with the actual meaning of the ICRC principle of neutrality. This just shows where some of those challenges are when we talk about one global workforce and bridging across cultures. I wanted to share those examples with you to show how difficult it is to get to some form of multi-cultural dialogue and understanding. What is important in this process is that you don't have to leave your own culture at the door of the workplace when you come into the ICRC or the United Nations. The challenge is that we have to dialogue about our cultural values and find ways to understand and respect each other's cultures.

For that to happen we need bridge builders. In our organization, we have a lot of bridge builders who are trying to be helpful in bridging cultural differences. The ombuds office is only one of those bridge builders. Other such bridge builders include the employees themselves, the supervisors, HR departments, lawyers, ethics departments, health departments, and stress counselors, just to name a few. I want to describe to you why I believe the ombuds function is a critical function that can provide added value in building bridges between people and cultures. At the ICRC, we had until recently only one ombudsman covering the ICRC globally from within the organization. Two years ago, the ICRC decided to create four full-time

150

ombuds function positions and they are located in different countries of the world. So while I am based in Geneva, we have a colleague in Amman, one in Nairobi, and one in Dakar. What we also have is, at the moment, twenty Ombuds Relays. Relays are colleagues who are trained in mediation and conflict management. They have their own job, but 10% of the time they contribute to supporting the Ombuds Office. The ombuds work is organized around the principles of independence, neutrality, confidentiality, and informality. For me, that means that I commit to a three- or six-year mandate as ombudsman. After that, I cannot continue working within the ICRC. I am the first ombudsman coming from outside the ICRC. I don't have a supervisor and do not receive a performance appraisal, and that puts us as ombudspersons into this very privileged space to be able to speak up and point our fingers to things we believe that are important to be seen and addressed by the organization.

We have various tools we use in our work and I am illustrating them with the help of some images. "The kaleidoscope": We are trying to have colleagues put on different kinds of glasses to allow them to look at things from different angles. It is like a kaleidoscope. As the tube is rotated, the tumbling of the colored objects of the kaleidoscope presents varying colors and patterns, allowing you to see situations differently. We are also trying to put organizations in that space to allow them to reframe and see the situation from a different angle. "The ear": We are taking time to listen to colleagues and to truly hear them. Doing that in the right way means active listening and can take hours. "The sharks": As an ombudsman, we sometimes also have to confront the sharks in an organization, become interventionist and proactive ombudspersons, and not just limiting ourselves to making observations and recommendations. "The alarm bell": We often see ourselves alerting, pushing the alarm if something doesn't get sufficient attention or priority. "The radar": We are trying to help an organization to developing heat maps to see, in terms of prevention, what could possibly happen. "The scuba diver": The "diving down" means trying to understand what is really going on under the surface and helping to surface that to the organization upwards to management and give it more visibility. "The helmet": The helmet is there to show the space we work in. For colleagues contacting us we are providing a very protected space. No one else knows about us being contacted. It is a safe space for colleagues to come and talk. We are not an office of notice. Anything that is brought to our attention remains confidential; we do not share the information with anyone else unless we get the green light from the person that contacts us. The only exception is where there appears to be imminent risk of serious harm. "The connector": As connector our role is to bring people together that don't

151

normally come together. This is a very important role of the ombuds. Like the colleagues who often stay alone in silos and don't normally talk to each other, we try bringing these people together in trying to find solutions. "The magic mirror": The magic mirror reflects a lot of what we are doing. Trying to help colleagues to see themselves and what is going on within them. "Why are they nervous about a situation? Why they are feeling to be victimized?" A lot of those questions are being asked to help colleagues to better understand what is happening and what their role might be in developing a solution for a problem they are facing.

In terms of the bridge building, we are trying to create a bridge between the employees and the organization. Many of the employees at the end of the day say, "what is in it for me?" On the organization side, important interests are related to efficiency and reputation. We work in that space. We are trying to develop linkages by encouraging a feedback culture or managing with a human face. That is some of the space we are trying to use to build more harmonious and human work environments.

The added value that the ombuds office is offering to the organization and to the employees is something that can be described in very concrete ways. Colleagues who come to us will potentially find themselves better prepared and better equipped to move on themselves. The ombuds office is not telling people what to do. The ombuds office is not making managerial decisions. What we are doing is offering people to be better equipped and prepared to move on their own, as well as helping them to see the value of working together to find solution.

The key messages from our experience in bridging cultures are the following:

"There are no shortcuts." What does that mean? In our experience, management is often expecting the magic stick. "Helmut, what can we do very easily that doesn't cost much but has maximum impact? Tell us." In such a situation we might say, "Is it that you want to train an actor to be better on the stage, or do you really want to go for a transformative process?" The transformative process has the potential to successfully manage change while maintaining and strengthening relationships. The same applies to trust building, which can best be illustrated by the following phrase: "Trust comes on foot and leaves on horseback." There are no shortcuts.

"Connecting at the human level." I recently had an opportunity to give an interview on the intranet for our 15,000 staff and I mentioned the concern voiced by many colleagues contacting our office relating to a perceived "de-humanization" of the workplace. Many colleagues today feel that in time of speed and constant change, including at the ICRC where we are moving from a small Swiss organization to a much bigger international organization, they are not seen anymore as individuals, but as numbers in a big system.

152

After three months as an ombudsman at the ICRC, some managers asked me, "Come spend an afternoon with us to talk about what you have seen in other organizations you worked in, what surprised you when arriving at ICRC, namely in terms of trust, stress levels and managing change." One central message I shared with the group was the following: "Those of you in management believe that you are informing the staff more than ever about the current transformation process. However, what you are doing is informing at the business level. You are providing the strategy, data, and analysis. It is facts, analyses, and evidence driven communication. Many of the colleagues today don't know what the change process will eventually mean for them personally. They communicate with the organization at this level of uncertainty, a communication at the emotional level and from the heart. The key problem is that there is no connection between those lines of communications, at the business level on the one hand, and at the emotional level on the other hand. Attitudes of people do not change through facts and analyses. It is only when the concerns, worries, and uncertainties are addressed at the emotional level that there will be again an opening for a rational dialogue. Not only do I believe that ombudspersons can play a role in assisting organizations to connect, but I also believe that we have the tools to bring the people together across cultures, including in bringing different levels of communication. So what I did in the particular situation with the group of managers was the following: I asked them to get up from their chairs, stand in a circle, reflect on how that feels, hold hands, and again reflect on how that feels and what connectivity really means in practice. Our intention there was to move the group from a business and evidence driven rationale into an emotional space and to invite for an additional perspective and, thus, creating a more holistic and comprehensive space for problem solving and conflict resolution.

"Mindfulness." Now this is probably not a surprise that this slide comes at the end of this presentation. In what we are facing at work, in the ICRC, and also in bridging cultures, the hope is that we will become more attentive to what is going on. In our current workspace, big challenges of transition include the increasing speed and a perception of dehumanization of the workplace. We risk losing the ability to read our emotions well enough, we don't take the time to read other peoples' emotions and we don't take the time to step back, take a pause, and see what is going on. I would hope that ICRC's mandate that is focusing on humanity will help the organization to also maintain humanity and the people dimension. I am interested in hearing from you in the audience how you secure in your organizations and work spaces the human dimension in managing across cultures. So thank you

153

very much, that was some of the ICRC experience I wanted to share with you.

III. PANEL DISCUSSION[5]

Dr. Bernd Fischer: I would now like to discuss with the speakers. I would suggest we first quiz you Helmut, and then we will continue by quizzing you, Rene. I will give my own points throughout, as well.

So Helmut, I especially liked your analysis of the situation in which your work has been in the third world. The mango field is a very good example because the third world provides our great mangos at Ralphs and Gelson's and we love it, but we often forget under which conditions the mango are ripe. In this environment, I want to share with you how we diplomats are trained from a point of view from understanding people from the third world better, and this might give other tools for your system.

We learn that there are basically two types of societies: the Nordic society, which includes Germany and, in a sense, I would also say includes the United States, and the Southern society. The Nordic societies, and it all has to do with time, are monochrone, and the southern societies are polychrone. This is a horrible simplification of things, but on the average it often hits the point. The monochrone societies go along a line, like a timeline. We meet at 9:00 a.m., we start at 9:10 a.m., and then at 9:15 a.m., Bernd Fischer will start talking, so-on and so-forth. The polychrone societies might meet at 9:00 a.m., but if the coffee is really good, we might meet at 9:20 a.m., and then if Bernd Fischer can't stop talking when he should after twenty minutes, they let him continue. That was a polychrone activity. Then, if Rene continued the same line, we'll have him in after the break. That is polychrome, but it is against the monochrone rules of life. Monochrone behavior is the behavior that is the rule in western societies, and one can say our success in many areas is the consequent of monochrone behavior. We say at ten o'clock tomorrow morning we have the meeting, and then we have the meeting at ten o'clock tomorrow morning. The polychrone society says, "We'll see. We'll start with four or five poly ideas and then, at the end, we will see what comes out of it." The worst is when a monochrone diplomat, like me, meets a polychrone counterpart. You are never where your monochrone line meets with him. And if you don't know about it, you go berserk. You're mad at the guy. You think he's inflexible and all that. But no, it's merely a different approach and you have to know it. That's why I mentioned it to you. For example, monochrone societies

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5. This panel transcript has been modified to conform to the compositional criteria of this Volume. For the complete video of this panel, see Pepperdine University, *Pepperdine Law: Managing Conflict 4.0 – Session 1 Q&A*, YOUTUBE (Nov. 25, 2015), https://youtu.be/Yb9EdKWRRzc [hereinafter Panel One Video].

154

are bad at software, so that's where the polychrone societies come in. So I just wanted to mention that because many of the conflicts which exist in the third world between us, even in the mango field, is when the monochrone come in and dominate the polychrone and wonder why the polychrone don't behave like monochronics behave. Still, our society becomes more and more monochrone for one reason, and that is the computer. The computer forces people to be more monochronic. So I just wanted to share that.

I want to share with you a second point and then we will go into the questions for you, Helmut. When we started in the German Foreign Service, our bosses in training school would tell us, "You are now going into your job with your colleagues and a sandwich board is on you all your life. Everybody can write something on you without you seeing." So your reputation is going to be the lazy guy, unfriendly guy, or nice guy. And you don't know because you can't where there is a situation with no mirrors, admittedly. So in the very end, you have so much loaded there, and often it's negative because people don't tend to right positive things. So there is a lot of information or opinions about you that you don't even know. That's what us ombuds people try to explain: the negative things that are on his sandwich board.

So these were my two little additions to you, and I thank you for that. Now, I will move onto the questions. In general, it is a question of which is also about labor unions. Helmut, are there labor unions in your job that make life a little more difficult for you?

Helmut Buss: Thank you very much. I would like to take that question first and also make a comment as to what you said earlier. The ICRC is a Swiss organization so we are subject to Swiss law, particularly in the cases where ICRC colleagues hold Swiss contracts that apply to all mobile (international) staff. The resident (national) staff holds contracts that are based on the legislation of the respective country they work in. So we have to follow labor law in those different countries, as well. That also means that we have staff associations, particularly in countries where it is required by law. It is different at the United Nations because it has its own internal legal justice system, which makes the existence of staff associations mandatory everywhere. From my experience, the role of staff associations in building good staff management relations in organizations is often underestimated. Sometimes, the mechanism does not work very well due to the individuals involved. But there are also a lot of very, very good examples where the need for good and systematic staff management relations through active staff associations is within the DNA of the organization. And if I may say, UNICEF is one of those organizations. They have very well working staff associations at local, regional, and global

155

levels, and in the space of managing conflict and moving through change, if you have well working staff associations, it makes it much easier to go through change because it makes the process much more participatory. It is much more transparent and there is higher-level ownership. I have seen in organizations where staff associations didn't work very well, and where senior management kept staff associations at arm's length; it was a huge problem.

Now, a comment on what you just said, Bernd, in terms of being organized and on time, or working more ad hoc and incrementally. You sometimes think that, after thirty years of working in an international space with colleagues from all around the world on an everyday basis and speaking different languages, you have seen it all. Five years ago, I started as an ombudsman for the United Nations Funds and Programs, which include organizations such as UNICEF or UNDP, and I started together with another ombudsman colleague. She is Senegalese and her name is Mame. She became like my twin sister. We were both ombudspersons at the same level and we understood from day one that we will only be able to successfully function and lead the office if we role model joint, gender and culture diverse leadership. So over five years, we worked through everything together. Everyone called us "The Twins". We always saw management together, we went on all missions together, and it was true collaboration across cultures. For me, it was constant cultural learning and not always easy. By way of example, when I came into the office I immediately wanted to open the computer and see what was going on so I could deal with things. I like structure and writing. For Mame, it was important to take time to talk, exchange ideas, and discuss what is happening in our lives. I started to see the value of starting the day with a half-hour conversation about the day and what happened the day before. I started to see the insights and wisdom coming from story telling, and Mame told fascinating stories. Once, we had a meeting and I said, "Mame, we have to go. We do not want to be late." She replied, "Wait. We have time." And it helped my cultural learning on the difference between energy or event driven management and time management.

In sharing this with you, I wish to illustrate some of my own cultural learning, and the collaboration with my ombudsman colleague, Mame, was a very special experience in that process for which I am very grateful. I have had the privilege to live and work in Africa and in other continents. It is very difficult for people who haven't gone through such an experience to connect in the same way with other cultures. Now, when Germans see tens of thousands of refugees arriving in Germany that have not had this international experience and don't know the individuals by name, they might focus more on their economic situation and get worried that their pensions will be taken away, or that they will have to pay a tax to support the

156

refugees. I sometimes think that I needed to go back home to help as a mediator and organize a dialogue between Germans, particularly those who have difficulties with these great numbers of refugees, and those who want to welcome them, as well as between Germans and refugees themselves. I'm still interested to follow this idea more to see how one can creatively build structures in Germany that promote multi-cultural dialogue between different communities by using conflict management tools, such as mediation.

Dr. Bernd Fischer: Thank you so much. Just one last comment on what you said. I worked from '85 to '88 at a German mission in New York, and my first meeting with members from all over the 150 counties was set for ten o'clock. I arrived at ten o'clock sharp and I was alone. I said, "Ok, I'll wait." At ten minutes past ten, I was still alone. Then, about twenty minutes past ten, the first person came and I asked, "What happened? Is the meeting being postponed?" He explained, "No, no. You must be new. This is the sum total of all the polychrones of the world." The meeting started at 10:50 a.m. When the next person arrived at 10:45 a.m., we were still among first. Polychrones have many advantages, but one has to know it exists, and that is the rule and when you deal with people from different cultures that are not exactly like our culture.

Last question at the moment for you, Helmut. How does the ombuds' function interface, if at all, with other dispute processes, like mediation, arbitration, and litigation?

Helmut Buss: Well, I think things in the ombuds office work often depend on what the needs are in the organization we work in. Organizational contexts are always important. In my experience it is a key role of an ombuds office to facilitate communication and dialogue and to connect actors in a way that they work together to find solutions.

For example, when I arrived at the ICRC, I saw that there was not much information on the intranet on where to go when colleagues have a problem. Something like a grievances handbook did not exist. There was no document where employees could go and say, "This is where I go if I have a problem." Everything was kind of "somewhere in the rules" and there was a great deal of perceived discrimination vis-à-vis local colleagues, who did not have the same recourse mechanisms as international colleagues. I got in touch with the staff association, with HR, with the legal counsel to see how we could develop such documents that describes where to go when colleagues face problems. How could we provide people with better information on support services available? We are now in the process to jointly develop such a document.

157

What I also observed while working with colleagues through the informal and formal conflict resolution mechanisms at the ICRC is that we call services that we are providing by the same name, but they mean different things. For example, as an ombudsman, I say, "We are listening to colleagues." The staff association tells me, "We are also listening." Once, when I gave the staff association a list of things that an ombuds office does, they took a highlighter and highlighted everything in yellow that they also do. I can tell you: the page turned very yellow. We realized that we were using the same words to describe our services that could mean different things depending on our respective mandates. We are now trying to develop distinguishable language that allows colleagues to better understand the difference between the different actors and the nature of services they provide. We are also promoting collaborative services to benefit from their complementarity, so it is not either or. We are even offering to organize joint meetings for some of our visitors so they have a space to talk in one setting to the ombudsperson, the legal person, or the staff association to obtain their collective input. I think that opening the space for very close collaboration while upholding principles of the respective mandates is a key role and opportunity of the ombuds office: to bring people together, open collaborate spaces, and create spaces where colleagues can talk together and work together to find solutions.

Dr. Bernd Fischer: Thank you. In the powers invested in me by the organizers, I'm now changing the rules a tiny little bit because this is the last chance this morning that you can ask question to Helmut. In what way do you react to whistleblowers or people who come in and point out problems?

Helmut Buss: One comment here. Very important, organizational ombudsmen don't have investigative powers, contrary to government ombudsman structures that have such powers. Our organizations have their own investigative mechanisms separate from ombuds offices. International organizations also have whistleblower protection policies. At the United Nations, the ombuds offices are not involved in that. At the ICRC, we envisage a system where the ombuds office might be able to assist in negotiating with the organization a space where a whistleblower feels protected to come forward without involving the ombuds office in the investigation process itself. In our work, we do come across situations where colleagues complain about abusive behavior of a manager or perceived abusive behavior of a manager. We are working with management and aggrieved parties to address such situations. In most organizations, colleagues who are perceived as being abusive are widely known. But an organization may not know what to do in such a situation or, if they do, they may be focusing on results that such a colleague delivers and not addressing the people management side of things. Here, the ombuds office has a possibility to work with the parties on how to address the

158

situation while protecting all of those people who came to us. In most instances, organizations are aware of their managers that are perceived as problematic or abrasive. There is no need for us to mention names of colleagues who reported those problems, and organizations often welcome that an ombuds office can come in and help them look at scenarios on how to help such managers look into the mirror and better understand what is happening and the impact of their behavior is for others. If such situations are not addressed early, and we will hear more about the cost of conflict during this workshop, they have the potential to escalate and result in very high costs for the organization. The ombuds office can illustrate those dynamics and the related costs that include, but are not limited to, financial costs, reputational costs, and human costs. When this is understood in organizations, it is our experience that they open up to and gets them interested in addressing the problem.

Dr. Bernd Fischer: Rene, you mentioned a lot of specific examples of what is different. The most fascinating is the time difference. This is so simple, yet so important when you work with a company. The time difference is a big issue. It can be your friend if you work in California because they leave you alone. I love that.

I had two postings in Japan talking about details with Germans. I'll give you one example and the cultural details. There was a big deal organized between a Japanese company and a German company, and I was present. The deal was close to done, with the Japanese company infusing a lot of money. When the German CEO, who had apparently not been prepared on the cultural difference, was offered one of the finest green teas they had, he asked if he could have a sweetener. Two days later, the deal was off. Believe me or not, all the Japanese said was, "What a sacrilege." Another thing is that we mentioned that Germans criticize mercilessly–and it starts in education. Children are often taught by their parents and friends. Not providing discipline to kids is an especially bad form of not giving love to kids. That's the German approach, admittedly it is watering down, but it is still in the back of minds of many people. And of course that continues, so when you criticize someone in your company you want to tell him something nicely, and you do it as a friendly gesture and nothing else. It's not negative. There's another saying in Germany: "There is no shame in falling down, only in remaining lying down." If, after ten times, you do the same mistake after you've told the person not to do this mistake anymore, then that creates a problem, which would need an ombudsman. Now Rene, the last question is for you and it's the last round, so I also want you to give an example of conflict management and on conflict resolution. So the

159

question is, what evidence do you see of cultural barriers when dealing with national, rather than international, cultures?

Rene Insam: Within the U.S., obviously, you can have massive cultural differences just from one state to the next. Just think about the West Coast and the East Coast differences, or even the Midwest. We all have stereotypes. I always think that stereotypes are not necessarily bad because it's a complex world we live in, and at least stereotypes get you started as long as you keep an open mind to make amends as to what stereotypes you hold. But I think that even within one country or within the same industry, you're going to experience culture differences that will grow into barriers if you don't address them.

So the same blueprint cultural management plan that I presented an hour ago applies to just managing culture differences that are of organizational nature and are presenting themselves within different cultures in the same country. Discovering what your culture problems are, aligning how you want to address them, what they should be in support of with regards to your strategy, and what you want to accomplish, and living it with a long-term plan – that applies just the same. Even within the same country or within the same macro-culture, you are going to encounter a culture dimension to what it is you're doing.

Dr. Bernd Fischer: In this context, the follow up question is, how do you use culture as a competitive advantage?

Rene Insam: Well that's obviously the Holy Grail, right? I think if you think about your own organizations, there is a phrase that "what doesn't measure doesn't get managed." And culture doesn't get measured. It's very difficult to say because its not one line on the balance sheet that says, "Here are our costs for culture." When I showed you that our three launch days were postponed, it was probably because of culture. So it's very difficult to manage it in a traditional way because it simply doesn't appear with a number value next to it on your spreadsheet or on your balance sheet. It's really evidential or anecdotal evidence that gives away where you're hurting because your mismanaging culture and it has the power to undermine your strategy.

I think the competitive advantage that you are working on with your strategy statement, mission statement, and vision is very much dependent on supporting culture. If your culture is in detriment to what you're trying to accomplish from a business perspective, that's when you're going to start feeling the costs. So you're only going to start feeling when it hurts you. When everything is going great and you have a culture in place that is supporting your strategy already, you have the luxury of not needing to manage it. Apparently it already aligns. Now that obviously is not going to be the case most of the time and you're going to start feeling the pain. It's almost like time stops for a split second when culture is violated. There was

160

a final example, where there was a conference call, someone in Germany made the call and someone who was not invited called in. All of a sudden, the rude German asked, "Who is he?!" There was a stunning silence for five seconds and we knew that that relationship was doomed from the get-go. That just hit the bottom line, and no one recorded it anywhere. But it happened.

Dr. Bernd Fischer: Thank you so much. There is one last question to you, Rene, and then I'll ask both of you to give a final word. The last question is, what is your definition of culture? Doesn't every type of group of people create their own culture?

Rene Insam: That's an excellent question and I already shared this earlier in the hallway. One professor of mine said, "Attempting to define culture is like trying to nail pudding to the wall." It's not going to work. Everyone has his or her own definition of what it is. And it's true that even us right here, that we are probably have a set of culture rules right now. Bernd has mentioned many times how we go over time, but apparently we're all okay with it because were sitting here while the food is getting cold. But maybe you also feel like its lunchtime. I'm hungry, my culture rules are getting violated. But you're buying into it. So we have some type of culture norm already established even though we don't know each other. That part of the statement is certainly true.

But I think there's a different aspect to culture in the business sense and how I have been talking about it today. That is, what is the culture that you want? The one that you already have as a group may not actually be the one that you actually need to get the most out of this event, and it's true for the business, as well. Yeah, their culture will just be there, which is why it's such a great resource. It's not an obstacle. It's a resource that's waiting to be tapped. But you need to ask a different question that is, "What is the culture that we are really after? What are the ones that you really want to consciously implement?"

Dr. Bernd Fischer: Okay. Before our final words from our two distinguished panelists, I will say goodbye to you now. It's been a pleasure having met you all and I hope to see many of you again. I thank you for giving me this opportunity Tom and Alexander.

Well, what is your experience, if any, on conflict management and conflict resolution?

Helmut Buss: In my view, conflict management and informal conflict resolution don't much have of a chance in organizations if there isn't someone "walking the talk" at the top. In organizations where the CEOs do not see the benefits of informal conflict management and people management, an ombuds office will have very limited space to move those

161

agendas forward. There is a risk that an ombuds office might become more of a window dressing exercise, without a true commitment of the organization. That being said, an ombuds office has lots of opportunities to make the business case for conflict management and it helps if organizations, as it is the case at the ICRC, work with us as strategic partners in that endeavor while keeping of course all our principles of independence and neutrality in place.

A last comment: I just want to share with you how fantastic it would be if we had a similar event to the one we have here today also in Europe in the near future, also in terms of bridging cultures. The conflict management space is very much driven by the North American practice. In Europe and other parts of the world, there is a lot to learn in terms of conflict management and by organizing such events also on other continents we could share those experiences across cultures.

Rene Insam: I want to stay in the culture space. What has really worked for us is getting things out in the open. Once people have a safe zone and a feeling that I could really share what's bothering me, the awareness that is generated got us halfway to solving our problems. People are now taking a second to assume positive intent. That 2,000-word email that I got? Before getting frustrated, I was thinking, "Yeah, this is an email from Germany. What do you expect? Maybe I'll read it." So just getting it out in the open and creating awareness was a huge part of managing the conflicts that we had.

As far as resolution, if you think of conflict as a fire and you throw water on it, how do you know that its really out? People will gladly say, "Yes, I get it, we're over it." Then a week later, it flames back up. Keep giving repeated discovery processes, keep giving people an opportunity to say what's not working, and create a very positive environment in that way. Also, especially cultivate what you started in the very long-term. Leadership support is also essential, so I second what Helmut said.

162