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The first colour blind American President?

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Abstract

This paper explores the link between a mindset of respect for differences and the benefits thereof for global organisations and persons. The profound influence of a person's mindset or worldview towards differences has on the performance of teams and people in multicultural and diverse settings is demonstrated with relatable anecdotes. The influence of the (subconscious) mindsets in these anecdotes is used to explain a model that plots the mental stages of development of intercultural sensitivity. It demonstrates the required mindset of global organizations, executives, leaders and individuals for dealing with the increasing awareness of differences stemming from globalisation that continuously "shrinks" the world of today. It is shown that a mindset towards respect for differences is not only essential to benefit from the hidden potential in multicultural and diverse settings, but also to prevent that same diversity from negatively influencing organisation and team performance. A meta-level approach for effectively dealing with the complexities and uncertainty attributed to multiculturalism and diversity in organisations and teams is briefly introduced.

1. Blind, deaf, tasteless, neutral and totally without senses!

President Obama colour blind? How will he deal with the diversity issues of not only his country, but also the whole world that he has such a large influence upon? Will he attempt to neutralize differences between people, or ethnic groups?

When Obama expresses respect for Muslim people, citing Muslims in his personal family, and praises the Persian civilization (Cohen 2009), it can be seen from two perspectives. From the first perspective he is attempting to focus on the commonalities between American and other citizens (i.e., saying that, although there are small differences on the surface, deep inside all people have similarities, like the need for food and shelter, their love for their children, ability to be happy and sad, etc.) and thus minimising the culture differences. Like one of his critics is stating:

"When it comes to culture, Obama doesn't have a public agenda; he has a public anti-agenda. He wants to remove culture from the political debate." (Harshaw 2009)

One way of removing culture from the political agenda is certainly to teach all people how to be culture-blind – when you see a black person, you are supposed to not even notice his "blackness" - so to speak: we should be colour blind. And for

that matter also gender blind, age blind, language deaf, tasteless, neutral, totally without senses!

On the other hand, and this is the challenging second perspective, he could be paying respect to the differences, saying that deep inside, below the surface of commonalities, there actually are substantial differences. But so do racists, sexists, and other discriminating parties! Isn't this the same reason apartheid was created and upheld for a number of decades in South Africa? The fear that the "inferior black culture" posed a threat to the identity of the "sovereign and superior" white South Africans?

Obama's public announcements do not appear to be of racist nature or discriminating against the Muslims and Persians or any other group for that matter. Much rather is Obama displaying respect for these "others": "I will listen to you, especially when we disagree" (Front Row Filmed Entertainment 2009), and "To the Muslim world, we seek a new way forward, based on mutual interest and mutual respect" (Phillips 2009). And that precisely is the key: RESPECT. A person with a "defensive" type of mindset (like a racist) also sees the differences; however, he sees them as threatening. A person with a respectful type of mindset sees the differences in a respectful manner. He is aware of the commonalities but also of the differences ("yes, they are also people, but have a different religion, background, values, beliefs, etc."). Instead of ignoring someone's blackness or religion, one rather becomes more aware of it, does not feel threatened, and develops the skills to deal with these in a respectful manner.

With Obama opening the intercultural dance floor with such sweet, respectful music, the intercultural competence arena is for sure going to become a busy beehive in the near future (as is right now everything that he touches). And quite rightly so, because, what is currently widely recognized to be the only feasible direction for Obama to take – show respect for others and building trustful relations with "outsiders" – also holds for global organizations:

Thou shalt not conduct successful international business anymore without properly addressing the intercultural competence topic as such.

So what then is intercultural competence and how can it be addressed in order for it to add the most value and has a lasting and transferable effect for the organisation? Another look at the obvious differences in this regard between former presidents Bush and Obama might shed some light on these questions.

Obama makes a clear statement against "those that espouse violence and... terror and act on it" but he simultaneously

fosters respect for those that "merely has a dislike, have been disappointed by and differ from America" (Cohen 2009). There is a major shift in the level of intercultural competence between the Bush administration's "blunt, bombastic, offensive and one-sided [approach] in its embrace of an Israel-can-do-no-wrong policy" (Cohen 2009) and Obama's subtle, respectful, self-critical, and balanced statements – or more accurately – two major shifts in the level of intercultural consciousness. The first level reveals a worldview of "us" against "them", of protecting ourselves against the threats (of the enemy). It is a worldview that feels threatened by the large differences in perspectives between for instance Muslims and Christians. It demonstrates a need to protect its own identity against these physical and social differences.

The latter type, Obama-like statements, reveals a worldview that indicates a competence or a sense of being comfortable with the differences between the various worldviews of people. The diversity amongst various nations, religions, orientations, etc., appears to be interesting. Rather than being a threat to the identity, diversity is seen as enriching the own identity. I reveals a curiosity to find out about the "others" and it does not have the polarised "us" against "them" viewpoint.

However, before a person that starts off with a worldview as demonstrated by the Bush-like statements reaches the latter type of worldview, he normally has to go through life changing experiences that first move his perspective to what is referred to as a Minimising worldview with regard to intercultural differences (Bennett 2001). It is a worldview, moving from the previous polarised (Bush-like) perspective, to one where the differences between for instance the American nation and other nations, are minimised and the focus is put on commonalities between them. This is the worldview inherent in the initial quote when stating that Obama, with an "anti-agenda", wants to "remove culture from the political debate" (Harshaw 2009). This is a worldview that says "deep down we are all the same", we all have the same principles and values. A view that is blind to differences – colour blind, race blind, gender blind, and without senses.

Although this is already a large improvement from the polarised type of view, it does pose certain problems and is not good enough for global leadership and reaping maximum benefit from diversity. The improvement this minimising view holds over the previous polarised view is that the aggressiveness, the active defence against differences is departed from. However, the actual differences are now just ignored or suppressed (minimised). So, to state in organisational terms: the black person is not kept out of management positions be-

cause he is different (black) anymore, he is just kept out of it because he is not similar enough. He is still not valued for his differences, i.e. valued for the diversity he brings.

For a president, Minimisation would mean having a view of focusing on commonalities or similarities between nations. "Most of the Muslims are normal citizens, just trying to make a living like we are". He still would not have respect and interest for differences and would not make a statement distinguishing between "those that espouse violence and... terror and act on it" and those that "merely have a dislike, have been disappointed by and differ from America" (Cohen 2009). A president in Minimisation would distinguish between "those that espouse violence and terror" and "those that agree with us" against the "others", which is of course already a step forward from the polarised view of "us" against "all others".

Global managers should not rest assured by the political tone thus far. The same principles hold for global managers. Global organisations employ people from all sorts and shapes. Differences between people are not confined to national or religious cultural aspects. Global organisations in particular face increased challenges in working with an even more diverse staff compared to national organisation. Global leaders or leaders of teams with diverse members also have to deal with these different approaches of for instance Italians working with Germans or Asians in one team, or the product project manager who has staff in his team ranging from development with an engineering background to sales and marketing people with a totally different approach to work than the engineers.

The ability of global leaders to deal with differences is, as can be seen above, crucial for the team and the organisation. In fact, Adler (1997) and Distefano (2000) (Figure 1) have shown in their research that multicultural teams either under or over perform in comparison to monocultural teams. Under performance is achieved when leaders do not pay attention to differences and let the differences, especially but not only cultural differences, stand in the way of effective teamwork. Multicultural teams are shown to outperform monocultural teams in cases where leaders acknowledge and understand the differences between the team members and use those as sources for gaining a competitive advantage. In short what this translates into for the global leader is that he should have the ability to sense and respect differences and build the competence to effectively deal therewith.
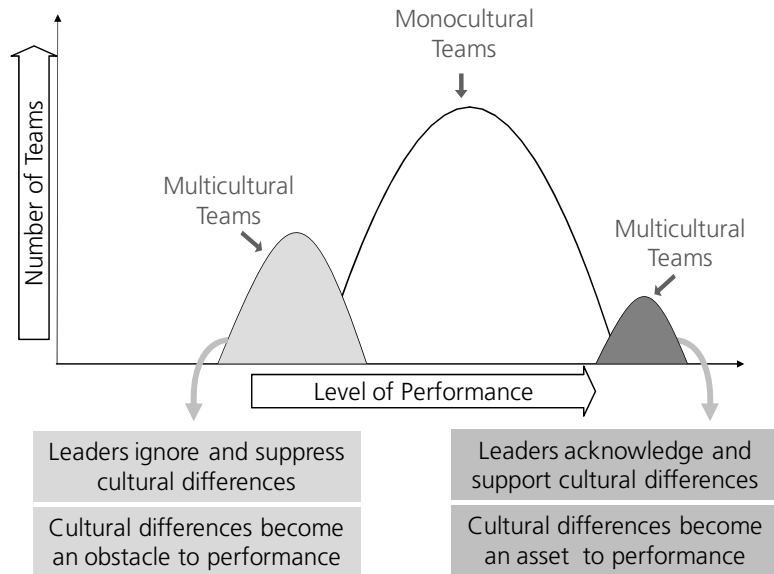
Exh. 1: Effectiveness of mono- and multicultural teams; Figure adapted from Distefano (2000)

Bennett (Landis 2004, Bennett 2001, Hammer 2007) has done extensive work in this regard. His Development Model for Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS)[1] indicates how a person's ability to deal with differences can be developed from a stage of denial, to defence, minimisation, acceptance, adaptation, and integration. Although developed in the context of intercultural differences, Bennett (2004:150) defines diversity as

"cultural differences in values, beliefs, and behaviours learned and shared by groups of interacting people defined by nationality, ethnicity, gender, age, physical characteristics, sexual orientation, economic status, education, profession, religion, organizational affiliation, and any other grouping that generates identifiable patterns."[2]

In a personal email from Bennett, he states "The term *diversity* ought to be used as a description, e.g. we have a lot of diversity in this company. The idea of *valuing diversity* (both domestic and international) is what demands *Intercultural communication* or *Intercultural sensitivity / competence*". Sidestepping possible debates around this, this paper assumes "diversity" to be "intercultural diversity" and use the terms interchangeably.

For instance, take the differences between engineers and marketing people, or that between male and female staff. Are these differences related to their background and upbringing (normally considered as culture) or to their profession, or personality? The important point is that those are differences that influence their worldview (mindset) and behaviour, and it is exactly the ability to accept those differences as interesting and the source of innovation and creativity that has brought organisations to appreciate diversity, not only as

an issue to deal with in order to avoid and resolve conflict between staff, but also as the source of ideas and important information. An Indian staff member in the development or marketing team in an organisation wanting to enter the Indian market is not employed to solve conflict, but rather to inform the western engineers and marketing staff what the Indian market requires and thus enabling the organisation to tailor their products to the local market. Obama demonstrates this mindset when saying: "I will listen to you, especially when we disagree (differ)" (Front Row Filmed Entertainment 2009).
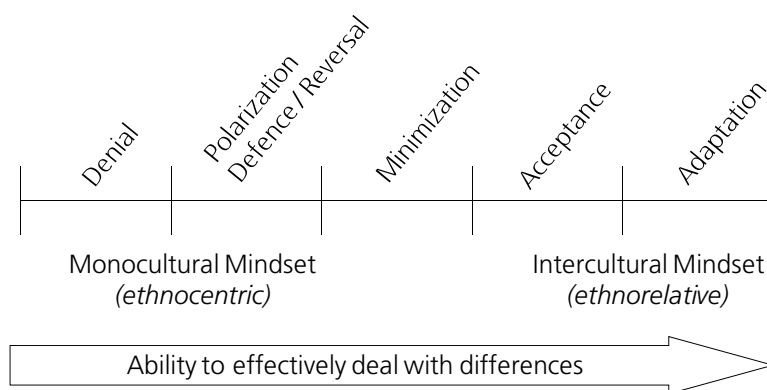
Exh. 2:   Developmental Model for Intercultural Sensitivity; Reference: Bennett (2004)

The DMIS was created to explain the "cultural" development of people observed over years as they increased their competence of dealing with different and differences in and between cultures and demonstrates how a person, in the process of becoming more sophisticated in dealing with intercultural differences, progresses from an ethnocentric to an ethnorelative cultural perspective. "The underlying assumption of the model is that as one's experience of cultural difference becomes more sophisticated, one's competence in intercultural relations potentially increases" (Hammer 2007:12). In global leadership terms: as the leader's perception of differences amongst organisational members and parties become more sophisticated, his ability to reap the maximum benefit from the diversity existing in the organisation increases as well.

The DMIS demonstrates six stages of increasing sensitivity to cultural differences, with each stage indicative of a particular worldview structure. Moving (developing) a person from one stage to another is what is referred to as the shift in consciousness (Moodian 2009). Figure 2 and Figure 3 provide more insight on this.

With his DMIS model Bennett indicates how a person progresses from a monocultural mindset, viewing his own cul-

ture as central to and the only take on reality, to an intercultural mindset, viewing reality as relative between cultures and different for each culture. Starting off with Denial a person denies the existence of cultures in general and thus also the existence of cultural differences. In the next stage of Polarization, a person is aware of differences, but perceives the world in an "us" against "them" way, with either "our" (Defence) or the "other" (Revelrsal) culture being perceived as superior. Often, in Defence a person notices the differences, but finds them threatening to his own identity and values system. To move onto the next stage a person needs to first lower these blocking defences. Lowering defences at first requires for differences to be minimized and kept out of sight. Moving on to the Minimisation stage, a person, in the process of lowering the defences from the Defence stage, thus focuses on the similarities between cultures. As the person with a Minimizing mindset becomes increasingly comfortable with "different others" and starts to move beyond Minimisation, that person starts to develop respect, not only for similarities, but also for differences. The awareness for differences is refined to a state where respect and curiosity drive a need for finding out more about others and appreciating their realities. This introduces additional complexity for the person in Acceptance to cope with - dealing with the dilemma of multiple perspectives and values systems - and as the competence to effectively deal therewith is developed, a person moves into Adaptation, where he understands and his behaviour becomes understood across cultural boundaries. In the Integration phase the differences are integrated into the person's cultural identity, however, this identity is no longer based in any one culture. That in short are the DMIS stages of development.

Denial of differences	Defense against differences	Minimization of differences	Acceptance of differences	Adaptation of differences	Integration of differences
Ethnocentric phase			**Ethnorelative phases**		
Differences are not noticed World is (too) simple. Blind spot regarding cultural differences	**Differences are noticed, yet experienced as:** - dangerous - threatening. World is polarized in "us" against "them"	**Differences are not important (minimized).** Assume that everyone experience the world in same manner, emphasize similarities	**Acceptance and understanding** of deeper cultural differences. Differences are not judged, but rather respected	**Find adaptive solutions in intercultural situations.** Experience what others feel like in their own contexts. Become comfortable with tension between cultural differences.	**Ability to adopt different cultural aspects as own.** Own identity becomes flexible.
"There are no cultural differences." "Significant differences are not cultural, but rather personality related"	"Us, and those against us." "Typical…." "It is difficult to deal with them." "Our way of doing us much better."	"Every body has the same basic perspective." "Treat everyone the way you want to be treated yourself."	"The more different perspectives, the better." "We need to find out what they feel." "We cannot simply impose our way on others."	"Ok, so we know now what everyone thinks, so here is what we can do…"	"We will get better results if we include the other perspectives". "I don't know what is so difficult about understanding other cultures."

Exh. 3: DMIS typical characteristics and remarks; Table adapted from Bennett's and Hammer's articles and documentation

The largest shift in intercultural consciousness is from the ethnocentric to the ethnorelative domain on the model, i.e., from Minimisation to Acceptance. It can safely be stated that the Bush administration was operating from a Minimisation perspective at most ("us and those that agree with us" against "them"). The shift from ethnocentric to ethnorelative is subtle, yet significant. It is the difference between being able to experience sympathy and empathy – when I experience sympathy I can imaging what I would feel like in someone else's shoes and with empathy I can imagine what others feel like in their own shoes. It is the shift from respect for "sameness" to respect for "sameness as well as differences" amongst nations, people, teams, groups, etc.

An Obama type of global leader shows Acceptance, or even Adaptation skills (ethnorelative). When Obama talks about respect, he refers to respect for differences as well, not respect for "sameness" alone. Respect for, interest in, curiosity for, flexibility towards, and open-mindedness with regard to differences, especially differences between people and their respective cultures. A person in Minimisation says: "yes, we

have differences, but deep down we are the same". A person with an ethnorelative mindset says: "yes we have similarities, but deep down we are different".

There are at least two shifts in consciousness between Bush and Obama, namely from Defence, through Minimisation, to Acceptance or Adaptation. Going through a major shift in consciousness is not an easily accomplished task. In a cultural sense it often involves experiencing a culturally challenging situation, being part of a minority culture or living in a very different culture for an extensive period, being discriminated against in a serious manner, and other similar very challenging situations. It is often only when a situation is extremely uncomfortable for a person, that the required self-reflection to achieve a major shift is practised with the adequate intensity.

2.   So who needs Intercultural Competence?

The question should rather be: "who doesn't need Intercultural Competence?" With the world becoming so much "smaller", our differences are becoming increasingly obvious. Dealing with differences nowadays cannot be avoided.

Viewing Intercultural Competence from a developmental perspective, realising that different people are at different stages of development, has some consequences for leaders in organizations. As can be seen from the effects Bush's statements had on people in other countries, cultures and situations (i.e. irritation, finding it ridiculous, incorrect, inappropriate, etc.), a leader with a Defence or Minimisation worldview will, without even realising it, have the same effect on the staff that are different from the mainstream - that being for instance other cultures in a largely monocultural setting, or females in a male dominant setting. When I interviewed a hotel manager from a leading hotel group, renowned for their quality of service (and their prices), asking him what his main take is on differences amongst people and how that contributes to the market-leading standard of service in his hotel, he responded: "Basically you should treat everybody the way you would like to be treated yourself". This is excellent for a customer or staff member that has the same background and expectations as the manager. However, for all those that have a different background and different expectations, it means having to be satisfied with that what the manager thinks is appropriate, nl. the western worldview-based hotel standards. It is a clear statement from a Minimisation perspective, as agreed upon by the manager himself after some discussion.

A Bush-like leader can effectively defend his organisation's "home" culture against any "identity threats" (remain as we are because we are the best). An Obama-like leader can lead his organisation towards Acceptance, Adaptation and Integration of global markets and businesses. The Bush-like person is only interculturally competent to speak to the people from the same cultural background as himself and are on the same level of cultural development or lower. An Obama-like person is interculturally competent to address the whole range of people in the global organisation. "Obama can connect with a rap star, CEO, and politician…" (Front Row Filmed Entertainment 2009). A leader might be, without even knowing it, only able to reach people with a Denial, Defence or Minimisation mindset. To some, those with the ethnocentric perspective, he might sound as the hero of their current crisis. Yet to others he might come across as a Tasmanian devil out of the bush – blunt, ignorant, bombastic, and offensive – when delivering his messages to the organisation (Fortelny and Jensen 2008).

Hammer (2007) points out that an intercultural trainer needs to have at least one level of consciousness higher than the participants he is trying to teach new intercultural skills. Stated differently, Bush, assuming he operated from as high as a Minimisation mindset, was only able to talk effectively to people in a state of Denial and Defence. This might demonstrate why so many people (who probably were at least in the stage of Minimisation) found Bush's statements and actions to be overtly inappropriate. Fortelny and Jensen (2008) found that "Democrats and Independents were unswayed by the president's (Bush) speeches" and that these speeches merely "reinforce(d) existing support". It would be disastrous for an organisational leader to merely "reinforce existing support" (mostly the managers), without being able to "move" the rest.

Many leaders, especially those that are already successful global leaders might already have reached the Acceptance or Adaptation level of consciousness – or maybe not! From an election perspective, almost 50% of the Americans and an even larger percentage of other nations did not agree and like Bush - and his success in conducting international business (politics in his case) was disastrous. The fact that an organisation is already conducting global business is not necessarily evidence for an Acceptance mindset of the leaders. But underperformance in global organisations is rather better proof of the (ethnocentric) type of mindset of the leaders (Adler 1997, Distefano 2000).

We tend to overestimate our own intercultural competence. Self-assessment and reflection to determine one's own level

of competence is found to be rather inaccurate. In almost 100% of the intercultural competence assessments witnessed, using the instrument developed especially for this purpose (Intercultural Development Inventory™, IDI)[3], people estimate their own level as being at least in the Acceptance stage. I have analysed a number of profiles of westerners who lived in the Middle East for more than five years, who estimated themselves as being in the Acceptance stage, but actually were still in the Defence stage. Overestimating ourselves in this regard is a very natural phenomenon. We all think we are open-minded and flexible, we allow ample space for others, and take their needs into consideration. However, the actual Acceptance mindset lies much deeper than that.

Edgar Schein (2004) explains the different levels of a person's underlying steering system, i.e. the background, principles, values, beliefs, and assumptions, as the person's culture and specifies three basic levels of culture: artefacts, espoused values and beliefs, and underlying assumptions. Whereas a person with a Defence or Minimisation mindset can equally well sense and understand the differences between cultures at the surface (artefacts level), it needs at least an Acceptance mindset to become aware of the deeper espoused values and even deeper underlying assumptions levels. Thus, to be able to really understand why a person behaves or reacts in a certain manner (being detail oriented, or using abstract language rather than direct, individualist or rather collectivistic oriented, etc.[4]), a global leader needs to be able to sense, understand, respect and appreciate the deeper lying beliefs, values and assumptions of people – i.e. a sensitivity to differences of at least an Acceptance level of competence – talk the talk. With an Adaptation level of competence, he will in addition be able to demonstrate appropriate behaviour towards others having different views on life, in other words to walk the walk.

Intercultural Competence (being a large and important aspect of diversity) is thus an important and urgent issue for global leaders to address.

3. Walk the walk

"I will listen to your input and expertise, and then I will decide". Leaders need to listen. Team leaders, virtual team leaders, managers - any leader with a diverse staff team needs to listen carefully. However, the employees of an organisation need to believe that when the leader listens, he also understands. Someone in Defence thinks the others (that differ from him) are wrong, so *don't want to listen*. Someone

in Minimisation thinks we all think the same, therefore *listening is not necessary* (will reveal nothing new) – "I already know what you want to say and need". Such a leader has sympathy with his staff.

Someone with and Acceptance mindset knows that there are too many differences amongst people for him to comprehend, leave alone anticipate what others think, want, or how they will respond. So he *will truly listen*, be attentive to different opinions, and, most importantly, have the capacity to understand what others feel like in their own shoes – i.e. demonstrate empathy with others.

However, this is not enough. A leader needs to demonstrate Adaptation, not only through listening and understanding, but also through walking the walk. He has to *demonstrate* that he also understands the important issues for the people whom he wants to follow him, especially those disagreeing with him. One of the first things Obama did in the oval office was to order the close down of Guantanamo bay detention camp before the end of 2009. This clearly demonstrated, especially to those violent antagonist of America, that he understands the other side of the story as well, e.g. the crimes against humanity committed in that detention facility. A leader with the ability to respect, appreciate and even maximise the benefit from the deeper lying differences, not only of food, clothes, customs and those things on the artefacts level, will listen, employees will trust that he understands, and he will demonstrate how to walk the walk. If not, the global leader will be what Bennett (Fantini 1997) refers to as the "fluent fool" - fluent on the surface with regard to differences between people, a fool because his inability to demonstrate his commitment thereto is easily recognised (daily experienced) by the staff members that have the differing values, beliefs and assumptions.

The essential question for global leaders is whether an ethnocentric (Denial, Defence or Minimisation) or ethnorelative mindset (Acceptance and higher) is his primary orientation. This is extremely difficult to self-assess, especially without the aid of an appropriate instrument and experienced professional (coach, trainer, administrator, etc.) who is at least qualified on a method or instrument (like the IDI) proven to deliver reliable results in this regard.

Fact is that global leaders, more frequently than comfortable, lack the required stage of sensitivity for differences to effectively address their organisations without triggering reactions typically experienced by many who observed the Bush administration at work, including arguably almost half of the American population (Wikipedia 2009). They explain strategies to their staff, deliver motivational and budget speeches,

address audiences outside their companies, like customers and press, and much more. Do they always, from a diversity perspective, have the required level of consciousness to understand whom they are really talking too, what the differences in perspectives are and how to address those appropriately and effectively? Even more interesting: would a leader still give the same speech and message if he knew he is "offending" a large part of his staff with his message (like Bush was doing)? I think that many probably would, like Bush did, out of ignorance - because of a mindset firmly rooted in an ethnocentric worldview, firmly believing that his own view is the only correct view.

4. Next-stage Intercultural Competence Development

Intercultural competence and, as explained above, competence in dealing with deeper rooted diversity, impact on various other areas of leadership and organisational competence. Leadership and virtual teams have been mentioned above. Conflict resolution, staff retention, recruitment, performance, communication and teamwork are all influenced by the leaders' and members' competence in dealing with differences amongst themselves (Hammer 2007). Whenever people are required to work in unknown settings or with people who differ in background or in any other significant aspect, the competence in dealing with differences becomes a valuable asset.

But how can this competence be developed? Traditionally people have been sent on overseas assignments basically with the message: "sink or swim" (immersion), hoping the required competence will be acquired overseas! Very often this did not produce the required results (Bennett 2001). Imagine a person still in the Defence development stage being sent on an international assignment. Being faced with even more threatening differences as those back home that put him into Defence in the first place, he might in the best case move to Minimisation or even Acceptance. But most likely he would make his defences even stronger and go deeper into Defence (or straight back home as so often happens).

Fortunately the field of intercultural competence development has progressed substantially since the days of cultural immersion (Pusch 2004).

4.1 Match Development to Competence

Using an instrument like the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) the competence of a group or individual can be determined for starters. This is a crucial step since, as indicated

by Bennett (2004), effective diversity competence development programs need to expose the "trainee" to sufficiently user-friendly topics. Bombarding a person in Defence with deep-routed, assumption level differences proofs to be less effective than introducing him to language, food and such surface level differences. A person cannot easily skip one of the developmental stages of the DMIS and therefore any development should normally be aimed at the next development step. Therefore, an instrument for determining the level of competence is crucial for effective diversity and intercultural competence development.

To give an example: If a person is in a Defence stage, the core message of any intercultural development should be one of Minimisation, i.e. "let us focus on the commonalities and minimise the differences for a while". Accurate cultural general frameworks (Bennett 2004:151) and culture specific knowledge should be used to point out the similarities between the other cultures and the person's own. "Harmless" differences, like the different types of food, clothes etc. will be extracted from the vast amounts of information available form the vast amount of sources, but the real hard core differences will not be addressed. On the other hand, for a person in Minimisation, the core focus is on pointing out the deeper differences.

4.2   Complexity, Uncertainty and dealing with the Unexpected

Amongst the various methods and instruments for developing the competence to deal with differences, especially intercultural differences (e.g., see Landis 2004, Moodian 2009), there is an aspect mostly ignored by these approaches: the ability to deal with uncertainty, complexity and the unexpected.

Dealing with complexity is of particular relevance for the shift from an ethnocentric to ethnorelative mindset (Minimisation to Acceptance), which, as previously mentioned, is a major shift in worldview. The person is requested to accept that there are more than one set of values, beliefs and assumptions apart from his own, and that these could differ substantially from his own as well. I have witnessed people moving backwards on the developmental scale when encountering such a situation. There are a number of people in the Middle East for instance, that originate from a largely Christian background, who could not handle the increased complexity of the Islamic and multicultural environment and moved back to a defensive mindset in order to cope therewith - erecting defences to protect themselves against the increased complexity. These persons have for instance decided to maintain so-

cial contact only with persons from the same nationality as themselves. They have erected a mental barrier (avoiding) as the "only way" to cope with the multiple value systems.

Great care should be taken to ensure the person with the Minimisation mindset is supported during the struggle to deal with the added complexity that the new, multi-value based mindset of Acceptance introduces. Respecting others' value sets implies being confronted with multiple options, possibilities and perspectives previously not even aware of (or minimised). Karl Weick (2009:31) goes even further and claims that a person will be more willing to see and accept the other value sets if that person has the capacity to deal therewith: "When people develop the capacity to act on something, then they can afford to see it." Weick demonstrates this with the case of "child abuse" in the early 1950s. Pediatricians refused to diagnose children with x-rays showing broken bones in different stages of healing as being beaten by their parents, since they had no means of dealing with the abusing parents. Children were rather diagnosed as having "brittle bones". Only once social workers were introduced to the workgroup (bringing ways of dealing with abusing parents to the table) were the pediatricians willing to accept the new diagnostic category of "child abuse". Thus without the capacity to act on the added complexity of the Acceptance stage, the person might just not be prepared to accept and respect the differences.

Now looking at another important aspect: uncertainty. In settings in the Middle East a single organisation with 1000 employees might have more than 100 nationalities, with the local population making up less than 10% of the staff, the rest being from any country possible. For a person immersed in such an exceptional multi-cultural situation, understanding and learning all the aspects of the differences between the multitude of cultures and his own culture (culture specific knowledge) is an insurmountable task. A single person might, like an anthropologist, be able to become really good in three or maybe four cultures at most. Working in such extreme circumstances as in the Middle East thus introduces a large amount of uncertainty – having to accept that one will never really know what is important to the others or how they will react in situations. Skills to deal with uncertainty are thus also crucial when dealing with multicultural or very diverse situations.

Especially relevant for managers, but not only, is the issue of the unexpected. In a multicultural setting, one is continuously confronted with outcomes that are not what were expected. Plans, attempts, etc. just don't produce the same results as "back home". This stems in part from the complexity and

uncertainty inherent in the situation as well. A person needs to be able to expect the unexpected, and when it arrives, effectively deal with it. This has a particular relevance for planning and management issues.

These aspects logically also hold when working in a diverse team. One can never really know and anticipate how others feel, think, act and react, even if they are from the same cultural background. Instead of assuming simplicity and certainty in these multi-valued situations, it is better to assume a degree of complexity and uncertainty and rather learn to cope with the unexpected. Diverse teams and organisations wanting to foster creativeness through increased diversity, need to become aware and carefully develop the skills to deal with not only the differences amongst the people, but also for dealing with uncertainty, complexity and the unexpected. Without that, the mental hurdle to overcome might just be too high for many. With that capacity people can then better "afford to see it" (Weick 2009:32).

4.3   eMC2 Approach

As indicated above, in situations where the benefits of the diversity of the group needs to be harvested, being it to overcome performance issues, foster innovation or creativity, deal with multiple cultures, etc., an approach that focuses on the competence to deal with differences, complexity, uncertainty and the unexpected is required. The eMC^2 (Management Competence for exceptional Multiculturalism)™ (Goutier 2009) approach, developed after spending an extensive time working in extreme multicultural situations, combines intercultural sensitivity development with the competence to deal with uncertainty, complexity and the added unexpected outcomes or events. The approach not only sensitises the persons to diversity and intercultural differences, but also gives them some tools to deal therewith effectively.

There are five major aspects addressed by the eMC^2 approach, four of which normally not addressed directly:

• Intercultural Sensitivity

• Intercultural Complexity and Uncertainty

• Intercultural Sense-making

• Intercultural Effectiveness

• Intercultural Knowledge

The last aspect is normally addressed in various formats by other approaches as well. The first four are aspect specifically aimed at dealing with the large amount of differences, first in creating awareness therefore, then in surfacing the differ-

ences and the assumptions behind those and then developing the ability to make sense, become effective and deal with the inherent complexity, uncertainty and the unexpected.

These are important aspects that are often neglected, leave alone being addressed in an integrated package. The other approaches and years of dedicated work by some well-respected researchers in the area of interculturalism are not herewith nullified. In fact, this approach supports those and during implementation draws on those valuable frameworks of the likes of Trompenaars, Hofstede and various others. These other approaches are incorporated in the designs (after the Intercultural Competence is determined with for instance the IDI) and used for the competence development. The difference however lies in the message taken from those models, concepts, approaches, etc. as explained in section 4.1.

The eMC^2 thus approaches an intercultural diversity intervention from a meta-level, using the ability to deal with differences as foundation. In this way it does not contradict or replace the other valuable ones around, but rather provides guidance in selecting the correct models, tools, and instruments and selectively adapting them to the correct "message" (i.e. Defence, Minimisation, etc.).

5. Conclusion

Global leaders and other persons in diverse and multicultural settings face challenges other than those in homogenous settings. People from different backgrounds have different ways of doing things and these fuel conflicts, frustrations, etc. that are very often causing teams to under perform. Apart from the wanted aspects (new perspectives, varied insights, etc., that exactly what is argued to be the advantages of diversity), people from diverse backgrounds also bring with them many unwanted aspects of diversity. People unfortunately do not only differ in the few things that are required from organisations. They differ in a whole range of aspects that cause unwanted stress in organisations. Teams can under perform, even in the presence, and sometime precisely because of diversity if there are resistance to the irritating differences or if these are swept under the carpet. Where leaders and members of diverse teams are not able to deal with the side effects of diversity - those being the difficulties of dealing with people that are very different to themselves – diversity poses more of an obstacle than a benefit for organisational and team performance.

Leaders also face difficulties themselves in developing the required mindset for understanding and being able to effec-

tively deal with the variety in these settings. A mindset of curiosity and respect for differences is required for tapping the benefits of the varying ideas and approaches that stem from the diversity in a team. Respect for differences, acceptance of diversity, being it in personality types, backgrounds, ways of thinking, and other aspects that are often perceived as non-work related, and a craze for being exposed to those, is what global leaders and organisations ought to develop. The world, as is demonstrated by the reactions to the Bush-administration, does not respect a Minimisation mindset anymore. Global awareness and global connectivity expose people to the vast amount of differences existing in our world. Holding on to the message of Minimisation – i.e. we are all human, we are all the same, let us hold hands – prohibits developing the required mindset for reaping the benefits of (global) diversity.

Yet bringing about a respecting (Acceptance) mindset is not achieved solely by creating awareness for differences amongst people. The current developmental level of the person should be taken into consideration. Telling an apartheids president (South Africa) that black people are different from the whites would only add coal to his fire. He needs to adopt a Minimisation mindset before he could be introduced to significant differences amongst people. Global leaders wanting to increase their effectiveness in dealing with their staff and teams that include members from diverse backgrounds, and even nations that need to move forward, all need to enhance their abilities to deal with differences - step by step.

Addressing the competence to deal with diversity and multicultural situations includes at least three additional important aspects, namely competence to deal with differences, uncertainty and complexity, and with the unexpected, that are often not addressed as such. This paper briefly introduces an approach for dealing with those important aspects, the Management Competence for exceptional Multiculturalism (eMC^2) approach, in the context of the other valuable approaches, instruments, methods and theories developed around intercultural competence development, in that it does not replace it or argue against those well tried and tested approaches, but rather serves as a framework for applying diversity and intercultural competence development in an effective manner that aligns to the prevailing worldview of the group or individual and incorporates the aspects of dealing with complexity and uncertainty inherent in diverse settings. In doing so, it avoids many of the pitfalls of generally available approaches in the industry.

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[1] The validity, accuracy, background, use, etc. of the DMIS is explained in detail in Bennett and Hammer's work, of which a number are listed in this document.

[2] According to Bennett (2004:150),

„this definition is also consistent with those of other writers, who characterize diversity as differences in people based on their various identifications with group memberships… a process of acknowledging differences through action (Carnevale & Stone), a multidimensional mixture (Thomas), or everyday individual differences that affects a task or relationship (Griggs & Louw)."

The field of Intercultural Communication offers extensive resources and material, developed over the last decade or more, and this paper will draw extensively from this field to demonstrate the main message.

[3] Intercultural Development Inventory is the legal property of Hammer Consulting, LLC, Ocean Pines, MD 21811, U.S.A. Conducting IDI assessments are only allowed by qualified IDI Administrators.

[4] Referring to Cultural General Frameworks – see various works of Hofstede, Trompenaars, Bennett, and many others on the differences between cultures and frameworks for interpreting that.