When eyes are opened...

An Australian student’s experiences at an intercultural seminar in Germany
Editorial

Learning to discover...

Discovering new cultures can be one of the most exciting adventures life has to offer. The French say "Les voyages forment la jeunesse" and it's true that young people are especially eager to experience the world.

Interculturalists well know that if sensitivity training isn't provided before embarking on a foreign adventure, the result is often a negative experience in which stereotypes are reinforced. Still, although the popularity of intercultural workshops has grown, the question "Does it really work?" continues to be asked (especially by those in personnel departments).

It's not easy to prove that it does. The development of cross-cultural skills and increased sensitivity is highly subjective, difficult to put into "hard" data. What we do know is that, when training is done properly, people feel more confident in their capacity to keep an open mind and enjoy the ride.

"When eyes are opened..." is a brilliant rendering of just how much an intercultural course can transform a person's perception. Written by a young Australian studying engineering in Germany, the piece shows why examining one's relationship to other cultures remains vital. Read more on page 18.

Last December your humble editor-in-chief passed on the SIETAR Europa presidency to fellow board member Debbie Swallow. A savvy British entrepreneur, she brings a long string of unique experiences from a world where the bottom-line is king. Her metamorphosis from businesswoman to devoted Sietarian is fascinating and I recently had the opportunity to ask about the early life experiences that led her to become a passionate interculturalist. Read more on page 2.

Language is said to be the basis of culture, the foundation of social communication, but what happens to words when they're used to prevent dialogue? Dan MacLeod takes a look at how global economics have changed the way people speak (or not) with each other. Read more on page 8.

Patrick Schmidt
Editor-in-chief
Debbie Swallow

An interview with the newly elected President of SIETAR Europa

According to Gert Hofstede’s study on cultural differences, the British show a strong need for individualism as well as a remarkable ability to tolerate uncertainty. This explains in part their tendency to be independent thinkers who are willing to take risks. An extreme example is former prime minister Margaret Thatcher, the single-minded grocer’s daughter who always fought for what she thought was right. A born leader who didn’t mince words, her fierce, no-nonsense attitude earned her the nickname the “Iron Lady”.

SIETAR Europa’s new president, Debbie Swallow, resembles Mrs. Thatcher in many ways. The daughter of a shopkeeper, she began running her father’s business after spending two and half years teaching English in Spain. She quickly learned that creativity, confidence and a good dose of common sense are all essential in managing a company which, as Dr. Swallow says, is “excellent training for surviving the ups and downs of economic turmoil.”

More than anything else, the human element is the key. Her ability to articulate why people are the most important asset in any organization caught the attention of many. She became a recognized business leader and went on to direct the Essex Training and Enterprise Council in southeast England.

One trait that makes her quite different from Mrs. Thatcher, however, is her multiculturalism. Fluent in French and Spanish, her years abroad made her acutely conscious of the need for intercultural sensitivity. In fact, Dr. Swallow’s passion for intercultural skills has led her to travel the world giving speeches on the subject.

I asked our new president how she transformed herself from a businesswoman to an interculturalist.

Let’s begin by having you tell us about your early life experiences.

Well, I was born in London but, when I was three, my family moved to a Southend-on-Sea, which is about 60 km east of the capital. That’s where I grew up and where I still live, right on the estuary of the river Thames, in the county of Essex.

My parents sent me to a private primary school, run by nuns. It was considered a good English education. For instance, we used to have elocution lessons, something which helped me build up self-esteem. Then I went to a State school and it was culture shock. The thing I remember most was the head mistress saying on the first day, “You will be here for five years, and most of you will turn out to be secretaries or factory workers.”

I thought, that doesn’t fit with me, to have no ambitions—I felt miserably unhappy. Then, two and half years later, my...
parents transferred me to a private secondary school. The moment I walked through the doors, I had the feeling I’d come home.

Shortly afterward, a teacher told me “You’re very privileged to be here. Your parents have their own business, they can afford to send you here. And you’ve already got a job, you’re going to take over your father’s business. You don’t realize how lucky you are.”

What I realize now is that the private school was preparing kids to be entrepreneurial, think differently, and have the confidence to take over family businesses and run them. Whereas the public school was just preparing you to have a job. Totally different aspirations.

I need to say that my father was a serial entrepreneur. Right after the war, he opened a florist shop (by a hospital) in central London, then added a shoe repair shop and later a café. He had an eye for opportunities. When he and my mother moved to Southend, he opened a stationery business, which sold office products and machines.

What did you do once you finished school?

There was an urge in me to see the world, to keep on experiencing new things. One of the major influences in my life was that, from the age of eight, my father and mother would take my sister and me on foreign trips in the summer. In those days it was really unusual in England to go on holidays abroad. We bought a tent and drove to Italy or Spain. I ended up playing with kids from all over the place, whether they were from Spain, Holland, Germany, France, Switzerland, Italy, you name it. And we couldn’t speak each other’s languages, we just got on and played. These intercultural encounters were probably what shaped me.

I also believe my father had wanderlust and I have that in the blood. It’s a spirit of adventure that makes you want to go out and see and do new things. So after my “A” levels, I went to a polytechnic school to become a translator and interpreter in business French and Spanish. After completing my degree, my first job was working with Ford in Valencia. I ended up teaching Spanish to the Germans and English to the Spanish because, at the time, the company didn’t have a common language. I stayed for about two and half years, then returned to England to get a TEFL qualification. But shortly thereafter I met my future husband and started working with my father in the family business.

I’d always promised to do so and he’d always said “One day this will be all yours.” So he was expecting me to go into
Debbie Swallow — continued

Her first long-term overseas experience was in the Spanish port town Valencia

the business and it never really occurred to me there would be a different future. I had it from school and I had it from home without anybody articulating it and without me ever questioning it. A few years later, my husband gave up his profession to join me in the family business as well.

How did you go from a business manager to an interculturalist?

That’s an interesting story in itself. It was in 1990 and we were going through a recession. My husband and I were running this business and we had to survive. I found myself making decisions I had neither the age nor the experience to make. I realized I knew how to do every job in the business but didn’t know how to run it. I decided to learn.

I started with an “O” level in accountancy, then did the “A” level and ended up as a management accountant. I knew how to monitor and measure the business but I still didn’t know how to run it in terms of marketing and people management. So I began taking a series of small courses and one-day workshops.

With all this learning going on, several things were happening alongside. In four years, the number of independent stationery stores had gone from 9,000 to 2,500. We were one of the few that were hanging on and I was having all my staff do training.

In the political world, somebody heard me speaking about people being the most important asset in a business. I was asked to be a director at the Essex Training and Enterprise Council, representing businesses from all over eastern England. Two universities were on the council and managing directors from some very big companies...and then a little managing director from Southend-at-Sea. That was me.

I learned what a proper board meeting was about and how professional organizations work. It was eye-opening to see how a big organization allocated government money for training, development and enterprise. You had targets and set your goals, making sure the money was spent wisely.

At the same time, I became friendly with the managing director of one of largest stationery suppliers in the U.K. and he began mentoring me. He knew I wanted to learn about business and said, “Debbie, what I can do is give you access to anyone in the business who you think you can learn from.”

The first person I met was the human resources director; I wanted to understand about reward and recognition systems, motivation. Then I met finance directors, operations managers, visited warehouses in London and learned about the computer systems that knew where all stock was. That experience over two years made me realize what I didn’t know.
That’s what started me on a master’s degree in business and management development, which I was doing part time while running the company. My thesis was on corporate collapse and turn-around and it was my oasis from the world. I didn’t want to give it up so I went one step further by starting a doctorate in business administration. My mentor then contracted me to help turnaround his ailing customers in the stationery industry.

Then, I began working as a freelance business consultant, one week a month in Finland. The consultancy specialized in Nordic countries and helped companies internationalize in a nine- or eighteen-month program. I realized that even though the Scandinavians could speak English well, do presentations and even tell jokes, their communication wasn’t working.

It wasn’t until I was sitting in the audience with some Finnish clients listening to a British speaker that it suddenly occurred to me why. The speaker was great, professional, entertaining, but it wasn’t what the Finns wanted to hear—he wasn’t getting through to them. I told my professor about it and he said, “Oh, you’ve come across cross-cultural differences.” I said, “What’s that?”

Within six months, I’d changed my thesis to “Accounting for culture in theories of knowledge”. In other words, how do you transfer knowledge across cultures in a business context.

An interesting journey, indeed. So what is it, from a British businesswoman’s perspective, that makes you so excited about cross-cultural communications?

It’s about making other people aware of intercultural misunderstandings. My main passion is speaking at conferences and asking “Have you ever had such and such a problem? I bet you thought somebody wasn’t being managed properly or blamed it on a lack of motivation. But could it possibly be a cultural misunderstanding?”

Then you see the light bulbs go on in people’s head. They come up to you afterward and say, “You’ve answered my question.” Because people always look for business solutions and never get certain problems solved because it never occurs to them it’s a cultural problem.

The bigger thing is to take complex issues and speak about them in a way other people can understand. While doing my doctorate, my head became full of theories, jargon like particularism, uncertainty avoidance, etc. You can’t talk like that to ordinary people. For us it’s a shortcut but you’ve got to package it so people can understand.
That’s what my doctorate was about—transferring knowledge across cultures. Unless you can shape your message and package knowledge in a way that’s recognizable and acceptable to the person you’re trying to communicate with, they’re just going to shake their heads and not like it, refuse it, not understand. The first thing you have to do is find something you can share and both readily agree on. Once you have that, you can take them on a journey.

The irony is that when I presented my thesis the two examiners said, “This isn’t a thesis, it’s more like a ‘who done it’.” They sent me away for a year to rewrite it so it read like a thesis. I thought “You’ve just proved my conclusion.”

Unless you package something in a way people can accept, they’ll disregard it. And that’s exactly what they did. They disregarded it because it wasn’t what they were expecting. You have to give people what they expect, then take them on the journey.

I think cultural understanding and values should be taught early, in citizenship and diversity classes. In some ways it’s as important as learning languages. Even a kid who can’t learn a foreign language can understand that different groups of people have different perspectives.

As President, how do you see the role of SIETAR?

I realize people have very, very different understandings of what SIETAR should be about. I passionately believe that SIETAR should be the go-to organization for people who want and need to understand intercultural differences. We have a membership so full of experience and knowledge that we can really help people become much more aware of cultural differences and how they impact every area of life, not only in business but in politics, health care, teaching. There’s such a vast scope we could help other organizations with.

And the world is ready for the message, whereas ten years ago it wasn’t. We are sort of on the crest of the wave; there’s momentum there that recognizes people do things differently in the world. I believe our organization should be positioning itself in front of the wave to say “Hold on guys, if you want to know about this, come talk to us. We can help. We have the expertise, the people who’ve been doing this for years.”

Unfortunately, I think many SIETAR members don’t have that feeling. It’s just a club for interculturalists to get together and learn a bit from each other. We’re missing a big opportunity. So, how do you want to transform this vision in a practical way?

There are three big targets I wish to attain. First, we need...
Debbie Swallow  
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“SIETAR has given me the priviledge to meet people from so many different walks of life and has enriched my life so much. I just want everyone in the world to share in this enrichment.”

You’ve described an extraordinary mutation from a successful businesswoman to a very enthusiastic interculturalist. What makes you tick?

Two months ago, I was asked to give a keynote speech in Las Vegas. The day before my talk, there was a speaker who told about being burned over 90% of his body when he was only nine years old—he wasn’t expected to live.

If I put this in a SIETAR context, I love what we do. It’s a huge privilege to meet people from so many different walks of life and be given experiences that lead us to have an open mind. My horizons have expanded and changed so much, they’ve enriched my life so much, I just want everyone in the world to share in this enrichment. I want to throw it out there and help others catch it.

We have such an important message and my fear is it gets lost, people don’t catch it. That’s my overarching vision: for SIETAR to shape our message so that others may understand.

I’d also like to increase SIETAR membership around Europe. Once they discover interculturalism, I’d like people to say “Oh, there’s an organization that gives so much value and has so many interesting people in it. I want to become a member.”

I looked back at my predicament in the early ‘90s. The two things that drove me to keep on were the love in my family and the fear of financial failure; letting everyone down. When that chap said it, I suddenly realized love and fear were the underlying drivers in my life, too.

Debbie Swallow  
An interview with SIETAR Europa’s newly elected President

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The meaning of meaning

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Interviewed conducted by Patrick Schmidt

We thank you for this most interesting talk.
Words...  
The meaning of meaning

by Dan MacLeod

When I was 14 I got the best hockey gloves money could buy. It was a very big deal, a lot of money for a Christmas present in our family, a kind of consecration. Except the new synthetic palms fell apart, literally, in the space of three months. So I wrote to the Cooper company and they answered right away, admitting I wasn’t the only one with that problem. They re-palmed the gloves in the previously-standard leather free of charge and I spent the rest of my hockey career, singing the praises of Cooper equipment.

Speaking of singing, when I was 18 I bought my first guitar. A year later, performing in public for only the second time, the tuning keys on three of my six strings suddenly unwound in the middle of a song, a very interesting sound effect indeed!

The keys were defective and the guitar was less than two years old but I didn’t have a receipt. So I wrote to the Yamaha company and said the store where I’d bought the guitar had gone out of business. Two weeks later I received a much better set of keys and a letter explaining this was to make up for my time and trouble. I’d spend the next decade playing music professionally and, whenever the name Yamaha came up, I told my little story about what a great company it was.

Not all companies were as honest and fair-minded but still, this was the way business was generally conducted before the 1980s took capitalism to a whole new plane of existence.

Henry Ford famously paid his employees enough that they could buy his cars, a kind of Rule #1 in making the economy go round. In the ’80s, however, General Motors closed factories in Michigan and re-opened them in Mexico where employees were paid four or five times less. The Mexican workers would never be able to afford new cars and neither would their counterparts in Michigan. That state’s welfare rolls exploded, bankruptcies and foreclosures killed tens of thousands of American dreams, and Michael Moore launched a documentary film career with “Roger and Me”.

Greed would seem to be contagious, as are standards and practices. A decade of Reagan-Thatcher union-bashing, regulation-slashing and the promotion of wealth (investment), as opposed to work (wages), was followed by the Perfect Storm of the collapse of the Soviet empire. Now the floodgates were well and truly open on a planetary scale.

As early as 1992 a Deutsche Bank vice-president told me German companies liked to make a steady profit year after year, a building process as opposed to the American “boom-and-bust” approach. “They double their money one year and go bankrupt the next!” he said, shaking his head. It was not logical, not smart, went against both democratic principles and basic common sense. But, he said, “The Americans have such power and business is now global; we have no choice but to change the way we do business here too, to do what they do.”
In a system built on skewed logic and dishonest practices, there’s a lot of explaining to do. Public relations, advertising, marketing and lobbying have never been so important in all sectors of society from finance and business to politics to professional sports to arts and culture. There have never been so many words out there and everyone’s a writer.

Physics tend toward a zero-sum game so it’s no surprise that the relative value of words has decreased in direct proportion to their very number. Sartre posited that words are essentially meaningless and he’d probably be less than pleased with how right he turned out to be. The thing about words, though, is they do translate state of mind.

Some 20 years ago, the Disney Corporation was criticized for paying Haitian factory-workers something like 30 cents an hour to manufacture t-shirts which were then marked-up about 1000 percent and sold to suburban America. Disney responded by willfully confusing minimum wage with a fictional wage ceiling; they said they had no choice, the Haitian government told them what to pay. Orwell, like Sartre, would have been thoroughly impressed.

More recently, after the BP oil spill of 2010 decimated the Gulf of Mexico, company head Tony Hayward told shareholders the company had shown itself to be “a good corporate citizen”. The disaster occurred because regulations were not just ignored but openly ridiculed and cost-cutting continued even when employees sent urgent reports about safety issues which warranted a shut-down of the entire operation. People died. Then the company lied—for weeks and outrageously—about the amount of oil involved. And unilaterally decided to use dispersants (which they, themselves, manufacture) that appear to have limited visible damage while increasing the ecological disaster on the ocean floor. But in the end they signed a check and, thus, could be proud of themselves.

All of which brings me back to hockey gloves and guitars and a problem I recently had with my electric bill. Hydro-Québec is an independantly-run corporation but it “belongs” to the provincial government, to the people, and I’ve been a customer for over 30 years.

Last year, however, I got a huge bill, a late-fee notice, even automated phone calls. Studying the Byzantine clusters of numbers across the top of the bill, I learned I had a new account, the other one had been closed. Everything was paid off months earlier but now I owed even more!

Around the same time, a new neighbor was doubled-charged her “installation fee” (more words: a push of a computer button) and was lucky enough to deal with “a nice guy who took care of the problem right away.” This is extremely unusual
Words...

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Jean-Paul Sartre asked, "What do words really mean?"

with what Hydro calls Customer Service so, when I called to sort out the problem, I asked for the same guy.

The agent I spoke with said she didn't know him and began talking about my bill. When I insisted she find him, she put me on hold, then came back to say he wasn't in that day.

How did she know? Did she talk to his supervisor? No, he didn't answer his phone. So he could have been in the bathroom. "Well, I suppose..."

The next day I talked to a different agent who at least bothered to find out where the guy I wanted to speak to was. Off doing a training course in Quebec City, supposedly.

I had no choice but to explain my problem to the agent at hand. He agreed that my new account made no sense, couldn't explain why the account I had for decades was suddenly closed. Yes, my payments were up to date. He'd study my case and get back to me by the end of the week.

At the end of a second week I called back to learn he'd forgotten all about me. But he had looked at the file. Whatever the reason, I should pay the full amount on my new bill.

He agreed it wasn't my fault but said I hadn't lost anything with the switching of accounts, The money was sent back to my bank. He's willfully ignoring months of new interest on a bill that was paid and new late fees.

He's tired of arguing so he dumbs it down in the most cynical way he knows. Speaking as if I were a child, he says "Computers aren't people, you know...They can't see when they've made a mistake."

I gulp for air for a few seconds, sort of like a fish.

He finally says he'll give me a few dollars back on the interest. But it's less than I'm being charged plus he's forgetting "administrative costs". I tell him it's their mistake. That I've spent hours comparing accounts, calculating fees, costs, "estimated consumption" versus "real". That I've now spent a lot of time on the phone as well. I know Hydro agents sometimes give a blanket "administrative credit" to patch up incidents like this.

"You want a $50 credit?" He's incredulous. "Sir, I believe I've answered all of your questions and I'm now ending this conversation." And he hung up.

And I knew I could call a supervisor but that's the thing—I can't anymore. Because the world is different than it was when I was 18. It will make no difference what I say. Words may matter to me but they won't to them...
Austria’s Low Power Distance

Was Hofstede perhaps right?

by Dr. Michael Buchmann

Geert Hofstede’s seminal research on cultural differences has been much acclaimed on the one hand and discounted on the other. In particular was Austria’s extremely low score for power distance, defined as the extent to which less powerful members of organizations and institutions expect and accept that power is unequally distributed; it incurred disbelief and criticism. “Everybody seems to agree that Hofstede got that country completely wrong,” as one interculturalist remarked to the author. This (abridged) article takes a look at Austria’s relationship to power and comes to the conclusion that Hofstede might not have been as wrong as some argue.

“Austrians are very power minded!” “Austrians respect power far too much!” Statements like these I hear repeatedly when I lecture or train intercultural management in Austria. Or stronger even, “the low score of power distance — must be wrong!” Hofstede had calculated the Power Distance Indicator (PDI) for Austria to be 11 on a scale from 0 to 100. Admittedly, this low score seems astonishing, even for some interculturalists and trainers. Doesn’t the “doctor, doctor culture” prove that power is highly valued in Austria? And doesn’t this “wrong score” – as some argue - serve as another argument against Hofstede’s research? Let us take a closer look.

Scores give us an idea about tendencies – and reflect various influences

One can always argue about the perfect accuracy of numbers and the exact scores of the indicators of culture (or “dimensions”) as a result of surveys. The scores only display tendencies. As in most countries, Hofstede conducted two surveys, in 1967-69 and in 1971-73. The samples were composed exactly like those in over 50 other countries, comprising 586 respectively 661 Austrian individuals in Vienna as well as in various provincial capitals. The scores result from statistical calculations of personal preferences surveyed amongst individuals. Respondents’ statements in a survey generally are the combined result of various influences.

The clear rejection of (position) power among Austrians surveyed may as well reflect reactions against a perceived misuse of power, and in some cases responses can be overly strong.

Such misuse may have been felt in childhood. Let me explain: On two other culture indicators Austria scores very high: masculinity (MAS) and uncertainty avoidance index (UAI). Masculinity stands for being tough, assertive and getting one’s way, and more related manners of thinking and acting. Uncertainty avoidance measures – among other aspects – a desire for telling ‘right’ from ‘wrong’, a dislike or rejection of differences as these are seen as potentially dangerous, and a risk to polarise when controversies arise – which at the same time people fear and try to avoid.

More so, any combination of high masculinity and high un-
Austria’s low power distance...  
— continued

Austrians generally address others by their titles

certainty avoidance easily fuels outbursts of agitated controversies. Examples of such controversies can be heated conflicts between father and son which may result in a father’s edict: “as long as you put your feet under my table you do what I say!”. Sometimes, these orders are even reinforced by pounding the table. Such drastic experiences in childhood can be mind-forming. The psychological resistance and response: “I don’t like power at all!”

The Austrian rejection of power may also have been a strong response to the disastrous “Führer-Prinzip” (leader principle). “Führer befiehl! Wir folgen Dir!” (Leader order! We follow you!) was the slogan propagated by the Nazis. The Austrian Adolf Hitler, after having established his dictatorial power in Germany, later annexed his homeland Austria. Though this was initially welcomed by many - of course not by all -, it was later also regretted by many. Thus, we could see the rejection of power as a kind of “lesson learned”. “Never again blindly follow a leader!” - It may be added here, that this has definitely been the case in Germany as well.

An aversion to power may also have been fuelled later in life. The respondents in Hofstede’s original survey were Austrians working with IBM. This also means, they were eventually directed and controlled by a foreign company. Thus, a US inclination to ‘know (management) better’ may have met - and sometimes clashed - with a similar Austrian inclination to ‘know better’. Even further, it met an Austrian aversion to anything / anyone foreign. Xenophobia is a phenomenon in Austria and an expression of such an aversion – as in all countries with high uncertainty avoidance. Hardly a surprise, again: One response to tough US headquarters – and thus foreign - power can be a strong opposition to power at all.

The ‘title mentality’ finds other explanations

“But Austrians address others always by their academic title” - or by titles in general. Indeed, there is this widespread practice, for instance “Herr Doktor”, “Frau Magister” or “Herr Ingenieur” for holders of a university degree. The degree will also be presented on the business card. Some participants in my intercultural MBA-programmes even labelled Austria “a doctor, doctor culture”.

However, this does not necessarily indicate a respect for power as such. It more reflects a reverence for academic achievements and success, for knowledge and expertise. Achievements and success are valued in masculine societies, knowledge and expertise in high uncertainty avoidance cultures: “He/she knows for sure!” Masculinity and uncertainty avoidance are exceptionally very strong in Austria. In my interpretation, they explain the observed behaviour better than an alleged power orientation.

“But what about addressing a woman with her husband’s...
Austria’s low power distance...
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Even during the time of Julius Caesar Romans call parts of Austria “terra disobediens”, where people disrespected those in power.

position or title, for instance ‘Frau Direktor’ or ‘Frau Professor’? Sometimes the position may only be assumed even! Isn’t that a proof of power orientation?”

In my view, this reflects medium individualism. Austria scores less on individualism than all other industrialized Western nations, lowest among Hofstede’s country cluster “Europe North, Northwest, Anglo World”. Family ties and social or political groups still play a comparatively important role in Austria. Thus, achievements of one family member also shine on others in the family. It also reflects the “face giving” and superficial politeness in everyday conversation which one can generally observe in less individualistic countries. No surprise, that some say Austria reminds them of Asia in its relationship and communication styles, or “the Balkans begin in Vienna”, as Prince Metternich is believed to have said 200 years ago.

Other examples of Austria’s low respect of power

● Romans at the time of Julius Caesar already called the territory which now constitutes lower parts of Austria and Hungary, “terra disobedienis”, meaning ‘a territory disobeying and disrespecting our power and rule’.

● The Austrian military medal ‘Maria Theresia Cross’, introduced at the time of the so-called absolute monarchy, was an order granted to persons who went against the order of the Empress / Emperor and proved to be right. Thus, successfully disobeying power was being honoured. Imagine, even “absolute” power was relative in Austria!

● The Vienna Philharmonic is – to the best of my knowledge - the world’s only great orchestra without a director. Since its foundation in 1842, the members of the orchestra own it and manage their business as a co-operative - without a boss. Even before the 1848 revolts against power in German speaking countries democratic self-determination rather than power orientation was valued and practised in this organisation culture, which became a showpiece of Austria!

● “But doesn’t the Austrian saying, ‘Vutaschrift is Vutaschrift!’ (regulation is regulation) tell us differently?” Well, it certainly indicates a need for rules and regulations. This again goes with uncertainty avoidance more than with power orientation. The “expert authority” of civil servants as “regulation producers” is acknowledged. But one doesn’t necessarily stick to their regulations. Isn’t the unspoken second half of that sentence and the common, tacit understanding “… and may be set to be breached’”?

The complete article, including consequences for leaders and managers in Austria, can be obtained at: buchmann@executivesynerg.net or via www.executivesynergy.net. Dr. Michael A. Buchmann, a German, is founder and sole proprietor of IMTEAM – Inter-cultural Management Team, and of Executive Synergy specialising on intercultural management training and consulting.
The Yin and Yang of Tiger Mothers: Building Bridges with Non-Tiger Moms

by Eun Young Kim

Harvard student was standing in line at an express checkout in a grocery store near Boston. In front of him was a young man with 12 items, although the sign said “10 items or fewer.” The checkout clerk asked him, “Are you an MIT student who can’t read or a Harvard student who can’t count?” I cited this story in my book, The Yin and Yang of American Culture: A Paradox, which I dedicated to my son, then a five-year-old. The story must have been created as a joke; unfortunately I saw the tough reality of US education in the story.

Raising a bicultural child for a globalized world, I wanted him to appreciate diverse cultures, starting with his own (Korean mom and American dad). So from my Asian perspective, I listed 50 US American virtues and vices for him to embrace or avoid in order to become the best combination of East and West. Lack of education, inability to speak a foreign language, and expecting an easy life were among the US American vices that I wanted him to avoid. But as a product of authoritative Asian parenting and its educational system, I made a conscious decision to be a kinder and gentler mom. However, whenever I travelled to Asia and met tiger moms, I asked myself whether I should let my son continue to enjoy his “work/life” balance into his teen years. I didn’t want to rush his childhood, but I wanted him to have the more hungry spirit that I saw in students in emerging countries. So I couldn’t wait to have him read the article, “Why Chinese Mothers Are Superior,” (published in the Wall Street Journal, January 8, 2011) hoping that he would notice that not only the students in Asia but also some students in the US work hard, too. I’m not sure whether he got that, but he was certainly entertained by the article.

Interestingly, the more I thought about Amy Chua and her book, the more American (than Chinese) she seemed to be. Certainly she demonstrated two key Asian values: authority as a parent and a strong work ethic. But I found the rest of her approaches quite un-Chinese.

Let’s start with the title: “Why Chinese Mothers Are Superior?”

Humility is a key Asian value. When we grew up, parents and teachers told us to be like a nice plant: Lower your head as you mature. Humble Asians would never have chosen such hyperbolic words. This reminded me of my own cross-cultural experience as a parent. When my son was about six years old, he entered a piano competition. His performance was about average, but he got a blue “Superior” ribbon. Every player was getting blue ribbons, so I asked his teacher what that meant. She answered: There were three performance categories: Superior Plus, Superior, and Superior Minus. No Average, no Acceptable or Needs Improvement.

Beyond the title, Chua’s communication style was definitely...
The Yin and Yang...  
— continued

A key value in Chinese thought is 'zhong yong', the middle way.

“tell it like it is,” which is more American than Chinese. With her in-your-face writing style, she spoke up without a concern for anyone’s face, including her husband’s.

Everyone whom I talked agreed that her parenting style was extreme. With a laser-like focus on results, she forgot about one of the key Chinese values: zhong yong, the middle way. Years ago I visited the Forbidden City in China. In front of the Hall of Harmony (Zhong He Dian) there was a sign explaining where the name was from, the Book of Rites, and a quote, “When we handle matters properly and harmoniously without leaning to either side, all things will prosper.” Could Chua and her family have benefitted from balancing her overly yang (hard and aggressive) energy with yin (soft and nurturing) energy?

I don’t want to judge. In fact I salute her courage to speak up (which is another American value in Cultural Detective USA) to bring up a sensitive topic for US Americans. I also admire her enormous energy and devotion for her children’s education.

In Korea where I’m from, child rearing is often compared with farming. Despite hard work and continuous nurturing, farmers may have a great harvest in some years and in other years, only bad crops. With that, wise people warn parents not to comment on anyone else’s parenting until they have successfully completed their own. Indeed, parenting is hard whether in the East or the West. Despite our best intentions, children often turn out to be very different from what their parents wished them to become.

After reading several responses to Chua’s Wall Street Journal article, I saw a need to build cultural bridges between Tiger Moms and non-Tiger Moms. For those who were offended by the article, Cultural Detective is a perfect tool for reconciling differences. Following the CD model, both sides may try to understand the cultural values and assumptions behind the parenting words and actions of the other, and appreciate the positive intentions. Yes, even tiger moms have positive intentions!

We all know that there’s no single formula for perfect parenting. Each child is unique and there’s a right time for everything — a time to use yin and a time to use yang — depending on his/her age, ability, talent and traits. Parenting is an act of balancing both yin and yang, not either or. When parents will not lean to either side, children will prosper.

Eun Y. Kim, President of CEO International, is author of nine books, including The Yin and Yang of American Culture: A Paradox, and co-author of Cultural Detective USA and Cultural Detective Korea. She can be contacted at www.drkimglobal.com
Book Review
Managing Cross-Cultural Communication Principles & Practice
(This critique first appeared in Dialogin, February, 2012)

by Barry Maude
£32.99, 369 pages
Publish by Palgrave Macmillan

This is the type of book I wish I had when I was beginning my work as a trainer and consultant. It’s an exceptionally well-researched and comprehensive review of all what is needed to know about the intercultural communication. And done in a serious and readable manner.

As the subtitle suggests, the book comes in two parts — principles and practices. Maude begins by examining the concept of culture as a logical starting point for understanding the process of cross-cultural communication and then skillfully denotes how values are a major source of difference in attitudes and behaviors. In the 3rd chapter, he provides proof on how language strongly impacts our perception, coupled with a discussion on how English dominates the global flow of information. In chapter five, the author deconstructs prejudice and stereotyping — presenting a very good overview of these two closely related concepts.

The second part is what I found most useful — the practical application of theory to practice. In seven chapters, Maude covers the nuts and bolts of our profession: expatriate performance, the development of cross-cultural skills, communicating across cultural distance, managing and working in multicultural teams, cross-cultural meetings and negotiations as well as interviews and selection. His texts are backed up with summaries of research findings, small exercises, mini-case studies, examples and personal anecdotes. The reader can only come away with a feeling of being given an exhaustive and thorough review of all the issues of globalized communication. In fact, each topic is so well investigated that a clever consultant just starting in the profession can extract the information and offer practical (if not remarkable) solutions to a client’s intercultural problem.

My favorite chapter was the one on developing cross-cultural skills. The author here provides new, refreshing ideas on basic rules of training. As he notes, research shows overwhelmingly that the most effective way to provide cross-cultural skills is through interactive work. It only reconfirms what I’ve observed in my own trainings: participants best absorb knowledge through game simulations (often fun and silly), resulting in effective changes in cognitive behavior. Another point he makes is that one-to-one coaching may be an expensive way of developing cross-cultural skills, but is extremely effective, provided that the facilitator is capable and well informed.

One element of criticism — the layout is sad to say, dull and uninspiring. In this day and age of multi-media visualization, the publisher could have put more resources into graphic design, creating a book that would have literally “communicated” to its readers. Nonetheless, the content is second to none — informative, perceptive and engaging. Maude breaks down the vast range of knowledge and literature to give a broad and practical view of what intercultural communications is all about. A must-to-have reference book for any trainer or consultant in the field.

Reviewed by Patrick Schmidt
Hesna Cailliau begins this new edition of her book with the familiar quotation of the Romanian philosopher of religion, Mircea Eliade, “No one can understand a culture without understanding the religion that gave birth to it.” Religion is sadly “the elephant in the room”. It is the unspoken factor in cultural analysis despite the fact that it is a critical force in politics, social structure and economic philosophy. Cailliau would reinstate the discourse about religion to its role in understanding the roots of cultural values and behaviors and rescue it from the deliberate ignorance of much social and educational policy purporting to create equality and laicity.

The book has three major sections, each of which could have been the subject of a separate tome. The focus is Europe, Europe seen in the light of East Asian religions, in the light of middle Eastern religions specifically Islam and, thirdly, the case of Turkey as a bridge between Europe and points east. It calls on the rich mix of the religious and cultural factors in the author’s own background. Hesna Cailliau is the daughter of a Danish Protestant mother and an Islamic Turkish father. She capped her ecumenicity by marrying a French Catholic.

The book is deliciously written, a homecoming to wholeness, demonstrating the author’s familiarity with the subjects and her ability to deliver a rich historical and contemporary commentary on them. When comparing Europe and East Asia the Cailliau offers a set of polarities or contrasts derived from religious thinking, which have become part and parcel of how we see the world: linear and cyclic time, philosophy and wisdom, belief and experience, exclusivity and inclusivity, the end and the way, absolute and relative truths, life as combat and life as art. Her further examination highlights the contrast between humanity seen as the measure of everything and seen as one species among many. This gives rise to further polarities between the word and silence, action and interaction, justice and fate, law and custom, individual happiness and social order, the cultivation of thought and the cultivation of emptiness, the logical and analogical, yin and yang. The differences are examined, not for the sake of judging them, or us, but to provide perceptions about ourselves and the directions we have adopted, whether we consider ourselves religious or not.

Despite my delight in refreshing my understanding of the juxtaposed core polarities, it was the second half of the book that fascinated me most. It is in essence an apologia for Islam. It is a corrective perspective that needs to be in place for those of us who do not come from this tradition and have been touched by recent turmoil and the immersed in the knee jerk self-justification of the West, still blind to the outcomes of its own colonial enterprise.

In sum, an excellent and insightful read, particularly useful for those whose tendency to avoid religious factors in intercultural work has arisen from anxiety about its complexity and its often controversial nature, to say nothing of those whose empirical religion causes them to dismiss any other kind of faith as superstition.

Reviewed by George Simons
When eyes are opened...

An Australian student’s experiences at an intercultural workshop in Germany

by Felicity Smith

The following is a summary of a German-American intercultural seminar, written by a young, 22-year old Australian student, doing a 6-month exchange program in engineering at the Karlsruhe Institute for Technology. Her refreshing observations provide a strong case why the development of intercultural sensitivity is a must in our globalized world.

It was clear to me that everyone enjoyed the course thoroughly. I can easily say that I got much more out of it than I expected. Despite the course being on the differences in German and American cultures, I found it very easy to relate to as the Australian and American cultures are similar in many aspects. However it wasn't until an Australian friend visited me a few days ago that I realised just how much the course had impacted me. I spend two days with this friend and I did not stop talking about it the whole time.

Simply put, this workshop was one of the most interesting courses I have ever participated in. After completion, it became very clear to me that it is important for everyone to undertake some form of intercultural training, even if they are not travelling, or doing business with overseas partners.

A lot of the course feels like it should be common sense, but I can admit my naivety. It was not until I started living in Germany, with Germans that I realised there actually were cultural differences. I was in denial, despite being warned by others, and various books. I think the denial was part of my coping mechanism, being away from home for the first time. Not to mention being half a world away from everything I have ever known. If I had completed this training before I left, rather than 5 months into my trip, I would have been much better prepared. Or should I say, prepared.

Lots of the differences I find difficult to pinpoint or label, it's more of an alien feeling that isn't purely associated with the language barrier. I say that everyone should undertake this training, because I believe that the awareness of differences is extremely important. Some of those who never travel, and sadly some of those who do, don’t realise that there is more to the world than what they know. They forever dwell in their own parochial microcosm.

In a business sense, the benefits of intercultural training now appear priceless. Before taking this course I would have thought that cultural differences would not act as huge obstacles in business ventures. I thought this simply because I assumed business remained on a professional level, whilst cultural idiosyncrasies remain on a personal level and that the two shouldn’t necessarily meet. The examples of failed business ventures in this course have taught me otherwise. For example the Walmart operations in Germany and their failed attempt to change the packing habits of German customers. It was Walmart’s cultural belief that they were doing things right, and if someone does something differently, then it’s their duty to give the ‘favour’ of showing them the ‘correct’ method. I found it strange when I arrived in Germany and had to pack my own groceries into a bag. Now that I am accus-
When eyes are opened...  
— continued

A campus scene at the Karlsruhe Institute of Technology

torned to it, I can see it is actually just a little bit quicker this way.

In this course I learnt the term ‘ethnocentricity’ – evaluating other cultures based on the standards of your own and believing that overall, your culture is the best. Once the concept had been discussed, I realised that I was ethnocentric, like everyone else. Once I realised this it became easier to appreciate the German culture, because I was aware of my strong bias.

Alongside the barrier of ethnocentricity is the unconscious projection of values, of which most of us are oblivious to. After discussion, I realised that I had fallen into the ‘trap of similarity’ – finding what my culture had in common with the German culture, and avoiding the differences. The more homesick I became, the more I projected my own values. In turn, this just made it harder to relate to the people around me. I live on a floor with 13 German students and one Spanish and the course helped me to change my expectations of them.

I learnt that understanding my own culture is the first step to understanding others. People generally think they understand their own culture, and don’t even think about it. However it’s not until you contrast it against another, that the various facets and ‘flaws’ become visible. For example, one thing that stands out to me is the work place, but what I’ve heard and learned from German’s about their work habits, it makes my previous jobs seem casual. I enjoyed the activities that we did in the course, where we were given stereotypes to play out. For example with the marshmallow and spaghetti tower building exercise, I was given the role of a German. Although the exercise seemed quite silly, it was quite eye-opening for me. As it was a competition, my instinct was to just start building and just get it done quickly. So it was challenging that I had to form a plan before we started, it just wasn’t in my nature.

After learning the method to understanding new behaviour – detect, interpret, evaluate, it seems like it should be common sense. However in reality I was simply detecting and evaluating previously. A simple example of this is that on more than one occasion when meeting a German, they would say something very direct, or blunt. I would interpret this as rude, dismissive or patronising. I now know that this is not a reflection on the character of the person, but as Ludwig Wittgenstein said, “The limits of my language are the limits of my world”. After learning a bit of German, and meeting quite a few Germans, I realize that they don’t use “may I” or “would it be possible if” or “would you mind if”. They are not being rude, they are simply saying the direct translation of their German sentences.

I think this directness in communication would be particularly useful in a business sense. Where a lot of money is involved, or
When eyes are opened...  
— continued

a large project is taking place, clarity is probably the most important thing. Especially as an engineer, if you think that something has been done wrong, or that something has been done better, then you have to say. It just wastes time, and adds to confusion if you say something like “maybe it would be better if” or “perhaps we could do this a little differently”. I always appreciate it when someone tells me straight out that I have done something wrong. The German language seems to be very suitable for constructive criticism. Being open to criticism is especially important if undertaking a project in a foreign country.

I found it very interesting to discuss the different mentalities when working on a project between Americans and Germans. Both cultures act in specific ways that make the other culture doubt them. Without some intercultural training, highlighting the differences, the preconceptions could hinder the progress of the project, or cause it to fail as both sides decide they can’t work with the other.

I loved the peach vs coconut analogy used to describe the different levels of privacy in the German and American culture. This is another area where Australia is similar to America. Especially with networks like Facebook, some people open their whole lives to the public. One thing I have noticed is that most of my Australian, and American, friends have 1000+ photos on their Facebook page. In comparison all the people I have added from Germany have less than 100 photos. Another difference is the quantity of “friends”. My Australian friends on average have about 400 more “friends” than my German friends. In class we discussed the difference in meaning of the word ‘friend’ between cultures. I much prefer the German take on this. It doesn’t make sense to have 100 acquaintances and attempt to interact with them on the same level that you would with your closest friends. This again comes back to the culture of not wanting to hurt anyone’s feelings, and people’s inherent need to be liked.

Milton Bennett’s Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity was eye opening. Upon my first estimation I would have considered myself in the adaptation stage. However after discussion I realised that I was most likely only in the minimisation stage. I also became aware that I was going through cultural shock. I was at the peak of my homesickness, and I was feeling disengaged from Germany all-together. I think the lack of ability to communicate strongly emphasised this. If I had chosen an English speaking country to do my student exchange, I believe that the culture shock would have been perhaps less, or non-existent.

This course was not only interesting and engaging, but beneficial to my exchange experience. It made me aware of my culture shock, and helped me overcome it. I wish I had partaken in a similar course before I had left my home country. I can see the importance in intercultural training before taking part in any international business venture. Understanding the basics of another’s culture can help prevent misunderstandings, and aid in the success of the venture.
A DISCUSSION ON CULTURE AND THE INTERNET / VIRTUAL WORLD

An informal continuation of the Krakow conversation

Some ideas that will be discussed:

• What are the increased challenges to intercultural communication and/or opportunities posed by the Internet age.

• How the tools or Apps themselves shape cultural values and constrain or aid communication. Does the way a particular application e.g. Facebook or Twitter reflect a cultural bias (US) and how does that constrain others.

• How will the use of Internet apps change cultures? How might people be developing what we might call an 'Internet culture' and how much that might influence or even dominate the 'local' or 'real world' culture.

• What should software application designers be doing to include the issue of culture into their design process?

• What if anything should Intercultural trainers incorporate into their material to allow for the challenges?

• How do different cultures adapt, thrive or struggle with the challenge of remote working and management?

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Cultus: the Journal of intercultural mediation and communication

Second Call for abstracts/papers

“Training for a Transcultural World”

Submission info at: www.cultusjournal.com

15th March 2012: abstracts
15th April 2012: full papers

ISSUE 5 (2012), will focus on “Training for a transcultural world”. We are particularly interested in contributions focussing on research, models, strategies, and also practical exercises which either break new ground on classic linguacultural divides, or are able to reach beyond static, stereotypical ‘cultural differences’ and make some headway in improving communication and mutual understanding in an increasingly transcultural and virtual world.

Hence, the focus will be on the ‘in betweenness’ and increasing ‘virtualness’ of living, translating, or working across dynamically evolving cultures.

Issue 5 2012 “Training for a Transcultural World”, in line with previous issues, will include an interview, a mixture of cutting-edge research and documented practical experience in the field.
Events, workshops, congresses

Milan, Italy
8-10, 12-13 March, 2012
21-23 June, 2012
Constructivist Foundations of Intercultural Communication: Applying the New Paradigm and Embodiment of Cultural Identity. Milton Bennett and Ida Castiglioni will hold these seminars that explore constructivist roots and the embodiment of cultural identity. 15% discount for SIETAR members. More information at www.idrinstitute.org

Winterthur, Switzerland
4-8 June, 2012
Interactive Training Strategies and Advanced Interactive Strategies. Thiagi, the most prolific and creative designer of games and simulations will conduct these highly acclaimed workshops. More information at http://www.diversityandinclusion.net/

Bath, U.K.
12-16 March, 2012
Developing Intercultural Training Skills. This is a 5-day course for experienced trainers in language and management training, who want to develop skills to design and deliver intercultural courses, or to integrate cross-cultural topics into their current courses. The facilitators are Adrian Pilbeam and Phil O'Connor. More information at www.lts-training.com/ICTTcourse.htm

London, U.K.
8-9 June, 2012
Building Intercultural Competence: from self-awareness to personal change WorldWork Ltd along with best-selling author David Ofman will explore how to bring about real change in coaching and training contexts. More information at eric.wang@worldwork.biz

Paris, France
16-17 March, 2012
Cultural Detective Facilitator Certification Workshop. Learn how to use effectively and profit from the Cultural Detective tool set in your work. Dr. George Simons will lead this seminar in English and French. Register directly in French at http://www.sietar-france.org/ For English, contact the SIETAR France secretary at secretariat@sietar-france.org

Konstanz, Germany
29-30 June, 2012
Global Leadership Competence: what it consists of — how to develop it. Peter Franklin and a small team of world-known experts are offering an exciting conference on the competencies required to lead people in organizations across cultures. A wide variety of keynote papers and carefully selected workshops will provide the tools for developing these global skills. More information at: http://www.dialogin.com/index.php?id=224/

Berlin, Germany
27-29 September, 2012
Global Integral Competence: mind, brain, culture and system. SIETAR Deutschland and Young SIETAR are collaborating on this forum. Dealing with the evolution of communication in a multicultural society, it will try to answer which intercultural competence is required for “cosmopolitan communication” in the future. Languages are English and German. More information at: http://www.sietar-forum-2012.de/

Online Everyday
The SIETAR Europa group discussing “Competence in Intercultural Professions” on LinkedIn has now over 2600 members in the group. Hot topics: “Does Having Intercultural Marriage mean Intercultural Competence?,” “Politician’s suggestion on getting to grips with Australian culture.” For more information, contact George Simons or Mirka Lachka at: sietareu.volunteers2011@gmail.com