An lively and penetrating interview with Fons Trompenaars
Gaining Synergetic Sophistication

Synergy has long been a buzzword among interculturalists. From the Greek *sunergos* (working together), it's come to mean an interaction of elements which produce an effect greater than the sum of their parts. In a well-conducted workshop there’s an implicit, and often explicit, expectation that facilitators will increase cooperation between individuals of different cultural backgrounds, thus productivity as a whole.

But what happens when there are two cultures and languages within the home? Does a child raised with opposing values and assumptions gain synergetic sophistication and a more sensitive worldview? Further research is needed but Fons Trompenaars’ story may provide some clues.

Raised by a Dutch father and French mother, he experienced daily how cultural differences create tensions which continually need to be reconciled. As an adult, his “outside the box” thinking helped him become one of the business world’s foremost authorities on cross-cultural management. (Read more on page 3)

A different form of synergy — and another childhood experience — is at the heart of “In Memory of Mr. Owens”. After a centuries-long struggle for equality by Irish Catholics in Protestant America, John F. Kennedy’s election as president in 1960 ultimately brought color-based apartheid to an end in the southern U.S. Reporter Dan MacLeod’s own memories of the Kennedy era helped him ultimately understand Mr. Owens, an old black man from Alabama who saw Barack Obama coming 18 years ahead of time... and knew he wouldn’t be alive when he came. (Read more on page 11)
An interview with one of the most influential management thinkers in our day

Anglo-Irish playwright Oscar Wilde famously stated “I can resist everything except temptation.” This little phrase summarizes an ageless human dilemma: how do we deal with the contradictory forces within ourselves?

On the whole, people in the West have been taught not to waste time with eccentric riddles; life is serious and should be treated with Cartesian “either-or” logic. And the bi-polar mindset worked fairly well in the industrialized world until the dawn of globalization. From then on, however, people (and companies) were continually confronted with bizarre codes of behavior.

It didn’t take long for individuals like Fons Trompenaars to look for ways to reconcile seemingly incompatible cultural traits. Born and raised in a Dutch-French family, he understood the contradictory lifestyles of Amsterdam and Paris and eventually wrote a doctoral thesis on the effect national culture has on corporate culture. Generating seven dimensions, he detailed how groups often hold values that are mirror images of one another.

He later teamed up with Charles Hampden-Turner to write the best-seller “Riding the Waves of Cultures” which identifies seven “opposing” value dimensions and the problems they create, then suggests solutions that often foster wealth-building. While scholars point out that the work is not as rigorous as that of a Geert Hofstede, it has become a major reference. The humorous, easy-to-read style and the countless case studies examined make it a highly stimulating must-read for those in international business.

Fons Trompenaars’ landmark research in international management has him very much in demand all over the world. Getting a hold of him wasn’t easy but thanks to the advances of smart-phone technology, I was able to share an early-morning (virtual) coffee with him in Barcelona.

What childhood experiences led you to the intercultural field?

Having a Dutch father and a French mother, my brother and sisters and I learned to shift between the two cultures and considered them equally real. Our summers were spent with my grandparents near Paris and two uncles, an aunt and seven cousins also lived there. It was a huge house with great feeling. It was also interesting as the subculture of families was so different in France.

Everyone sat down for two warm meals a day together, which wasn’t very Dutch. And it tasted good, which wasn’t very Dutch either! And there was wine at the table, which was a no-no in Holland.

One time I went to France alone and when I came back I...
forgot to speak Dutch to the taxi driver—I was really inundated by French culture. It also came with problems. When I was 18 or 19, I was still living with my parents and my Dutch friends at university had all moved out of the house. I knew I couldn’t do the same out of respect for my mother.

So those early experiences laid the foundation. But what exactly pushed you into a lifelong career of cross-cultural research?

It happened accidently. I studied economics with a major in organizational behavior. When I finished at the Free University of Amsterdam in 1978, one of my professors told me about a PhD scholarship in the States. I was fairly young and decided to try. The jury consisted of top professors from all over Europe: André Laurent, Geert Hofstede, Giorgio Inzerilli, Gunnar Hedlund. I hardly knew them. Anyway, to cut a long story short, the jury gave me the scholarship. Afterwards both Laurent and Hofstede said, “For your PhD, why don’t you look into the cultural side at the Wharton Business School in Philadelphia?”

Having been raised in a Dutch-French environment, everything fell into place. Laurent with his French enthusiasm encouraged me to go into this field and Hofstede handed me a pack of articles. I loved reading them and thought his work was fascinating. That’s when I got the cultural virus. My idea was to write a thesis, entitled “The organization of meaning, the meaning of organization.” The organization of meaning being culture, and the meaning of organization being corporate culture. So my dissertation was about how national culture affects corporate culture.

On the cultural side, I developed something, based on Max Weber’s thinking and Toennies’ *Gesellschaft und Gemeinschaft*, that I called left brain versus right brain. And for corporate culture, I took Hofstede’s Four Dimensions. Hofstede was not known at that time and the panel asked me to defend his concept. So I went back to Hofstede, to whom I owed a lot, and asked “Why those four dimensions?” His answer was simple — he got angry.

It was obviously the weakness of his research; it was not deductive, but inductive. His work was based on other types of research at IBM that he statistically analyzed. That was the sensitive point. Hofstede has been very important for the field of cross-cultural management because he started it, but he also closed the field. If you are in multicultural management, you should be open to other approaches. If people criticize my work I usually learn something. The trouble with Hofstede is that you can’t have a discussion with him.

So I had to develop my own stuff. I took Hofstede’s work and added that of others. If you want my deeply scientific discourse on how I came to the Seven Dimensions, it’s...
simple. I took all the existing models, many overlapping, put them into a basket, shuffled them and came up with the seven that are always mentioned. Parsons, Hall, Hofstede, Kluckhohn, Strodtbeck.

As for my research, it was comparing Shell refineries throughout the world. I received a scholarship from the company but they didn’t interfere with my work. I developed my own questions and tried not to be ethnocentric. I had my questionnaire tested by multicultural groups and what we call focus groups today. I also used existing parts of questionnaires on, for example, internal and external control, the validates locus control questionnaires by Julien Rotter and so on.

What did you do after finishing your doctorate?
I worked in Human Resources at Shell in their main office in Rotterdam and the Research Center in Amsterdam from 1982 to 1989. The latter was a big organization with 2200 people of 30 different nationalities. I later wrote "Managing People Across Cultures", a look at how the company adapted to cultural differences.

I continued my research there. For example, I examined how two social researchers at Shell had developed the HAIR L system. ‘H’ stands for helicopter quality, the ability to look beyond the problem (see the big picture), then land on the problem (see the details), a sort of lateral thinking.

‘A’ stands for power of analysis, ‘I’ for imagination, ‘R’ for a sense of reality and the ‘L’ at the end for effective leadership. All the bosses and managers were graded on these five basic qualities, what are now called competencies. And when we recruited people, we looked at their currently estimated potential (CEP), the job group they’d belong to at 50.

I correlated the five appraisal qualities with the people’s potential. If you do straight correlation, everything correlates so you have to do multi-variate analyses, to arrive at partial correlations. In the Netherlands only analysis and imagination correlated and imagination correlated negatively. I remember my first boss at Shell who said, “Fons, you are OK. But there’s only one problem — you score very high on imagination and that is very bad for your career at Shell.”

The company was essentially saying imagination was bad for potential. Cynics would say, “Imagination will make you a great researcher, but not a good manager.”

We found that imagination scored much better in France. Analytical ability also scored high in France but the sense of reality was low. In Germany, on the other hand, leadership scored the highest. So the system is culturally biased. What do you do if people in the London or The Hague headquarters look at a wonderful French candidate, but find he scores high on imagination? French management
appreciates this trait but the British and Dutch look at each other and think, “We can’t move him to the next level.”

I could explain this sort of behavior with my research, Hofstede’s research, Andre Laurent’s research, Edward Hall’s research, all the research, but the question became “So what?” In other words, what do we do now? I think the big problem in our field is we see the world on a bi-polar scale. Everybody’s great at explaining why people are different and why something doesn’t work but they don’t have a clue how to make it work.

So what did you do to resolve this problem?
I think we are getting into the core, where my calling is. While at Shell I read an article by Charles Hampden-Turner, one of their consultants. “A Tale for Two Paradigms” was a bit about East versus West and ended with, “It creates dilemmas. What can we do to reconcile those dilemmas?” This five-page article not only summarized my four years of research and my dissertation but went far beyond it.

I sent Charles my thesis and he came back a few days later and said, “I think we can work together. I reconciled all of your seven dilemmas.” I said to myself, “What the hell is this guy saying?” And he gave me a crystal-clear example, asking why an individualist couldn’t be a collectivist at the same time.

“If you an individualist without collectivism, you’re an egoist and it doesn’t work. If you’re a collectivist with connecting yourself to an individual, you’re a communist and it doesn’t work.”

The meaning of life is in how you combine opposites. Great individuals are individualists and offer the fruits of individual greatness to the team. And great teams are those which nurture individual excellence. Why don’t we measure how good nations are by connecting opposites? It took me 15 years to really understand that.

Could you explain in more detail what you mean by combining opposites?
We have made the world bi-polar. Take the Myers-Briggs questionnaire, which has four categories: introvert – extrovert, thinking – feeling, judging – perceiving, sensing – intuitive. There are observable differences in personality according to national origin. The predominant type in British management ist ISTJ (Introverting, Sensing, Thinking, Judging), while in the U.S. it’s ESTJ (Extroverting, Sensing, Thinking, Judging).

Myers-Briggs fans find solutions in the team, complementarities of types, or they refer to the fact that the types are only preferences and all is potentially within the individual.
But why were the questionnaires designed on mutually-exclusive values in the first place? Our Western way of thinking is based on Cartesian logic: “either-or”, not “and-and.” This is in contradiction to what Carl Jung had in mind when he construed the underlying conceptual framework behind MBTI.

Any Myers-Briggs person I meet, I ask “Does scoring high on thinking mean I need to score low on feeling? Why is my thinking done at the cost of my feeling? And why should I score low on collectivism if I score high on individualism?”

Take the U.S. It’s very individualistic on every score but if you look at volunteer work and community groups, it’s great. Icons like Bill Gates and Ted Turner make a lot of money but they also give back to society.

This is the paradigm I used at Shell. If you have imagination, it’s the vertical bar on the grid, the y-axis. Sense of reality is the horizontal axis. You measure people on the combination. A person with imagination but no sense of reality is a “daydreamer”. A sense of reality with no imagination makes you a “landed mole”. We made grids for analysis and synthesis, as well as intuitive and sensing and it worked everywhere: great leaders are those who combine. That’s true in Germany, in France, in America, even in Japan.

Coming back to my original example of the French candidate, his challenge is to go from imagination to reality. For the Dutch, it’s the other way around. We call it dilemma reconciliation.

**Do you see interculturalists moving toward dilemma reconciliation?**

Not really. I live in Amsterdam where 60% of people under 18 don’t have Dutch parents. So the majority is diverse — Dutch, Moroccan, German, Turkish, Italian, what have you. We can explain, Turks are like this, Moroccans are like that. So what? What we need is a paradigm that connects them. That’s what my company is all about. When we do our workshops, participants say “Wow, dilemma reconciliation is what we need!” Clients understand we not only offer a model for showing differences, but an approach toward dealing with the difference.

I have to laugh when I go to conferences, it’s all about what’s the best model. And I’m thinking “Are you still at that stage? You still don’t get it?”

In my opinion, if you look at our field in the last 30 years there hasn’t been a major breakthrough in thinking. In academia, it’s peanuts what they do today. They quote each other in great admiration and don’t allow any criticism.

What we need is to have a fundamental discussion on how we can get the bi-polar models into a third way of combining.
Who cares what model you use. Give me insights on how to deal with the differences. I would love to discuss what is the best model and it will be a wonderful discussion. But I also want to have a discussion on what are the next steps. Third-culture reality is dilemma reconciliation.

We had a time where the half logics we developed in the US, France, Nigeria and Japan were OK for local people because they stayed home. Today we need to develop a paradigm that works in multi-cultural groups. We have to go beyond linear thinking and think about how to develop trans-cultural competence, the competence to recognize, respect, reconcile and realize cultural differences. A competence model that doesn’t include the competence to connect different viewpoints is useless.

**How does SIETAR fit into all this?**

I think SIETAR can play a very important role but it should go beyond following an existing pattern. I went to a national SIETAR event recently and was dumbstruck at how people are still explaining cultural differences. It’s a bit like going to a doctors’ conference where they all smoke. I told them they had to become more effective at dealing with those differences. Cultural awareness helps but let’s not exaggerate its importance.

In SIETAR we need to practice what we preach. We need to say “It’s wonderful to have different viewpoints. Let’s combine them and reconcile dilemmas.”

We have responsibilities to the world. All the problems we are facing — wars, religious conflicts — have to do with intercultural issues. Let’s have a good discussion and let’s not exclude people. Even if you don’t reconcile all the dilemmas, at least you’re in a dialogue between cultures. In the long run, it will certainly help.

**Last question: Is there anyone else who has been a source of inspiration, apart from the intercultural thinkers?**

I often write with Neil Young’s music in the background. The combination of hard rock, soft acoustics and great lyrics is overwhelming. I had the privilege of meeting him on the boardwalk in Santa Cruz in 1978 and after a concert in Rotterdam three years later. In 2001 I gave him the first copy of 21 Leaders for the 21st Century—it’s dedicated to the “ever inspiring” Mr. Young.

There’s also John Cleese. We did a series of workshops together a few years and he taught me that humor is essentially the result of two opposing logics both becoming logical. It’s an important message for organizations like Sietar.

*Interview conducted by Patrick Schmidt*
Empathy and Wealth

As wealth increases, empathy seems to decrease

by Patrick Schmidt

The concept of empathy is inseparable from intercultural sensitivity. The premise of any training is that a feeling of compassion needs to be developed, which in turn leads to better communication. Empathy, however, is not equally distributed and this has major implications in intercultural relations. Essentially, research has shown that one’s sense of wealth vis-a-vis others determines to what degree he or she is willing to enter into another person’s subjective world.

In its April, 2012 issue, *Scientific American* published a fascinating article. “How Wealth Reduces Compassion” reviews the latest studies on the relationship between empathy and material wealth and comes to the conclusion that the richer you are, the less likely you are to act fairly.

On first reflection, this would seem to go against common sense. If you already have enough to take care of yourself and your family, wouldn’t you be inclined to think about others’ needs? Not according to Berkeley psychologists Paul Piff and Dacher Keltner.

They conducted experiments on whether social class (education, wealth, job prestige) influences how much we care about the feelings of others. In one study, they surveyed drivers at a busy four-way intersection. Drivers of luxury cars were found to be more likely to cut off other drivers rather than wait their turn. Upper-class drivers also tended not to stop for a person trying to cross the street, even after making eye contact.

Later, Piff and his colleagues came up with a clever approach as to whether selfishness leads to wealth (rather than vice-versa). Participants were asked to compare themselves to people better or worse off than themselves. Before leaving, they were shown a jar of candy and told they could take home as much as they wished, what was left would be given to children in a laboratory close by. The participants who thought of themselves as better off took far more, leaving little behind for the children.

Another study examined how social class influences compassion. On a regular basis, less affluent people were more likely to describe feelings of compassion for people who were said to be suffering. Results were unchanged after controlling for factors such as gender, ethnicity and spiritual beliefs.

Similarly, participants from different social classes watched a video about children with cancer and their hearts were monitored. Those on the lower end of the spectrum (for both income and education) were more likely to display compassion and their heart-rates slowed down considerably--they were paying more attention to what they were seeing and hearing.
Empathy and Wealth
— continued

Other research tells us that higher the social strata, the less likely people recognize the emotions of others. They also pay less attention to those with whom they interact, simultaneously doodling or checking e-mail on their smart phones.

The intriguing question is why research consistently shows that wealth and status decrease our feelings of empathy? Conversely, if you have fewer resources, wouldn’t you be more likely to be selfish? Piff suspects this paradox is related to the feelings that abundance gives us, a sense of self-importance and relative independence. The less we depend on others, the less we may care about their feelings.

And then there’s the new attitude we have toward wealth, as depicted in the film Wall Street. Beginning in the 1980s, financiers and entrepreneurs began championing the mantra, “Greed is good”. Thirty years later the gap between rich and poor in Western democracies has returned to what it was in 1929, on the eve of the Great Depression.

As anyone who reads a newspaper knows, the Crash of 2008 changed nothing except to transfer trillions of taxpayers’ dollars across the developed world from public coffers to private industry and bank vaults. Most of the same people continue to run the finance and business sectors, doing business the same way, paying themselves the same bonuses. And right-wing politicians the world over continue to fight against regulation of any sort.

If we accept the research-based premise that social class influences empathy, it stands to reason that people of privilege are the least likely to make decisions that help those in need. Yet political power has always resided among the upper classes and—with increased deregulation of campaign financing—this has never been more true than today.

Next fall’s U.S. election may well set the tone for the future. Republican candidate Mitt Romney has bragged about forcing welfare mothers to work when he was governor of Massachusetts. He earned over $21 million dollars last year without having to work himself, a simple return on his investments. He paid only 13.9% in income tax (far less than most American workers) but wants to cut taxes even further, as well as many of the social programs they pay for. And although he got rich by closing companies and out-sourcing labor to China, India and Mexico, he says he has no need to apologize for success in business. A few weeks ago, when asked about students who couldn’t afford to go to college, he suggested all they had to do was borrow the money from their parents.

The most disturbing thing of all is that he could actually win.
I wasn’t quite sure what to expect of the coming three days as I climbed aboard my EasyJet flight to Milan last week. I knew three days spent in the company of Milton Bennett and other interculturalists was going to be stimulating and probably a good deal of fun. However, there was a surprise at every turn which never failed to keep me enthralled.

I attended Milton’s 3-Day Course: "Constructivist Foundations of Intercultural Communication - Applying The New Paradigm" which turned out to be one of the best decisions I’ve ever made. Coming from a business background, I’ve always thought I had side-stepped into the intercultural communications field and had gaps in my understanding of the subject. Only too well aware that I had no formal learning in socio-linguistic studies and behavioural science, I found I was always trying to fill the gaps by catch-up reading about cross-cultural differences from many other perspectives. Now I have a firm grasp of how all the different approaches knit together and, more importantly, what constitutes the realm of intercultural communication... and what doesn’t!

Every day I was introduced to new tools and techniques which I could easily have played with for hours - just like a child with a new Christmas toy. To say each day was like Christmas Day isn’t an exaggeration. My brain was challenged and stimulated in equal measure - and I enjoyed every minute. I learned so much that I had to revisit everything on the plane home AND when I arrived back in my office in case I let anything slip from my grasp. The highlight of our time together was experiencing a water tasting evening. “To have the ability to discern water,” remarked Milton, “will help you with your ability to discern cultures.” And so, the evening began with us learning how to discern the taste and texture of flat and sparkling waters. An amazing experience that I am so pleased I had the opportunity to undergo.

Needless to say, as we were in Italy, wine did eventually replace water and was accompanied by a magnificent meal. Forty-five empty glasses and three and a half hours later, five sober but merry folk left the restaurant to find sleep before meeting up for our last day together.

I thoroughly enjoyed Milton’s three-day event. In terms of professional practice, I’ve come away with lots of new tools and techniques to use with my clients and a greater confidence in my ability to assess their needs better. In terms of my own self-development, I’ve come away with a depth of understanding and new insights into my own topic area. I’d recommend anyone in the intercultural field to attend.

*The Foundations course is just one of many run by the Intercultural Development Research Institute see: www.idrinstitute.org
From Owens to Obama

by Dan MacLeod

Ethnicity, religion, social class, skin color, language—all of these are thrown together in myriad combinations in post-industrial societies. Intercultural training takes for granted that participants, while possibly skeptical, are there to learn, to evolve, if only for the good of the companies they represent.

But what of people in general? What of people who remain willfully ignorant, prejudiced on purpose? That, it would seem to me, is the crux of intercultural theory and perhaps the ultimate goal.

Barack Obama has been president for over three years now but the hatred persists. He and his family go to a Protestant church most every Sunday but over half of the country’s Republicans believe he’s a Muslim. As well as a Communist. Or a Fascist. Or a Kenyan. What do you do with that kind of stubborn, racist ignorance?

Most of my work as a reporter has dealt with ethnicity, religion, social class, skin color and language. The following is a look at the journalistic version of intercultural field research...and also the marks it leaves on the journalist.

When Mr. Obama was elected I wrote the following essay:

In Memory of Mr. Owens

Eighteen years ago I met a very old black man in a Birmingham, Alabama barber shop. He told me that someday America would have a black president but he wouldn’t be around to see it. “Son, I done live seventy-eight years. I ain’t gonna live no other seventy-eight years!”

Ted Johnson, sitting next to Mr. Owens, nodded to the beat of the words, then nodded his agreement. And Mr. Owens didn’t wink or grin or shake his head at the end, he just looked at me, stating a fact.

I’d seen the firehoses and the police-dogs on television when I was six and it had scared the hell out of me, men in suits and ladies dressed for church being chased and knocked down. Those scenes took place right outside this window--this was the barber shop in the background in 1963. I felt like I was inside a photograph.

What I couldn’t understand at 33 was why Mr. Owens wasn’t bitter. The two barbers hadn’t seemed delighted when Ted introduced me around but Mr. Owens was talking to me as if I were Ted’s own nephew, not some white guy with a northern accent.

1) seventy-eight  2) other
From Owens to Obama
— continued

I told him I appreciated his openness with me, said I was surprised he wasn’t mad at white people in general. He looked at his feet and, grinning, shook his head. He looked back up. “What’s the difference ’tween us? I’m black. And yo’ white.”

“Now I know I can’t come to yo’ house evuhday! But I can go there sometimes. And you can come to my house. And there’ll be food for you there…”

I’d been interviewing people for eight years, had hung out with Arabs in Paris, black-marketeers in Munich, I.R.A. supporters in Belfast, coal miners in West Virginia, African-American gang-members in Chicago, homeless people in Montreal. I’d never felt out of place before but now I was lost. He was “speaking in parables” and I was an atheist. He was serene to the point that I wondered if he wasn’t a bit senile.

“But you guys got beaten on just for trying to vote. You went off to defend the country in World War II and twenty years later you still couldn’t even vote!”

His patience had a limit. “I know that! I seen those dogs up close!” He was out of his seat incredibly quickly for a man his age and started to unbuckle his belt. “I got scars on my butt! You wanna see the scars on my butt?”

I assured him—waving my hands and talking too fast—that No, I believed him. He looked at me for a second, sat down with a kind of hurrumph. “Boy, we had the Devil down here!”

That was my point, though. And the devil in question had blown up a church and killed four little girls. He’d refused to share schools, lunch-counters, busses, even drinking-fountains.

In 1963, blacks in the southern half of the country weren’t “second-class citizens”, they weren’t citizens at all. But the white majority thought it was the way things should—and always would—be. A century after Abraham Lincoln freed the slaves, Nobel laureate William Faulkner was still pleading that the South needed more time…

By 1990 I was working for French-Canadian radio but was neither Canadian nor a francophone, I’d grown up in Boston and was three-quarters Irish. As a kid, I’d always been proud of John F. and Bobby for sending the National Guard to help the black people I’d seen getting beaten up on tv.

1) everyday  2) scars
From Owens to Obama
— continued

According to my teachers, my schoolbooks and my mother, the fact that all men were created equal was the rock our country was built on, the reason we were better than all the other countries. Boston was called the Cradle of Liberty and democracy was a sacred word. The Kennedys were Boston-Irish and John F. was the America’s first Catholic president. Before him, my mother said, we hadn’t been equal.

I didn’t really understand what she meant because almost everybody I knew was Catholic. Supposedly there were people out there, in our own country, who didn’t like us. I figured they were probably the same people who didn’t like Negroes. The way I saw it as a kid, Catholics and Negroes were kind of on the same side.

The Kennedys were one thing, Nixon was another. I left for Canada as soon as I graduated high school. My family didn’t have money but I had an exportable skill, the ability to play hockey. And, as my life charted its own course, I never went back. Fifteen years later I was a French-language network reporter in a barber shop in Birmingham listening to Mr. Owens.

“See, times have changed. I can go into any restaurant, order a ham sammich, ain’t nobody goin’ to say no. Twenny-fi” years ago I seen myself walk ten blocks for a drink of water!” To me, that was the amazing part: just how bad, how horrific, how undemocratic things had actually been. Except that, one short generation later, black kids didn’t even bother to vote. Surely that pissed him off?

Mr. Owens grinned and shook his head again. “It ain’t time yet. They’ll be counted when that time comes.” And then, as if sharing a secret, “I won’t see it but you might.”

That was enough for him, his belief, the certainty that America would have a black president someday. He said, “Martin Luther King tole me and Martin Luther King tole you: he has been to the top of the mountain an’ he has seen the other side!”

He’d been a Pullman porter for forty years, from the Great Depression to the end of the Vietnam War, and every last “Yassuh” put his daughters through school. Both were nurses, neither lived in Alabama and he couldn’t have been prouder of having provided them the wings to fly.

Mrs. Owens had been dead for years but Eugene Owens wasn’t going to Florida to live with his daughters. He stood up when I did and we shook hands. He told me, matter-of-fact, “I’m a Alabama felluh, lived here all my life. I ain’t goin’ nowhere...”

1) twenty-five  2) Yes, sir
From Owens to Obama

— continued

Ted Johnson went over to thank the barbers, each of whom had a man in the chair with two more on deck. All six had stopped talking when I took out my tape-recorder; they'd listened to every word but hadn't joined in. Everyone was polite but happy to see us go.

Ted was around 60, closer to Mr. Owens' age than to mine, and drove a rusted-out boat of a car filled with fast-food styrofoam, empty pop bottles and old newspapers. He said he was the bandleader at a local high school. He also said he’d been in Military Intelligence during the Korean War but couldn’t talk about it. (“Top secret, son. Confiden-tial.”)

We’d only met at lunch, a chance conversation in the dining-room of my hotel, but Ted claimed to know people and he did. We were on our way to talk to Demitrius Newton, one of Alabama’s first black lawyers, a man who’d worked with Dr. King and was now a state congressman. But Ted had led with the barber shop, which he said was a political rallying-place in African-American history. “I was hoping you’d meet Eugene and there he was!”

“...That man told you something, it’s just it's not easy for you to understand. Listen to the tape two or three times, you’ll figure it out.”

Which I did, back in Montreal, and Ted was right. Mr. Owens had a lot to say. I was blessed—as both he and my Irish granny would have put it—to have made his acquaintance. He was far from senile and probably less serene than I’d thought.

It wasn’t so much the childish magic of religion as the practical wisdom of patience. Turn-the-other-cheek-but-never-surrender. Win by ultimately winning. Ghandi, not Buddha.

In his first and only inaugural address, John F. Kennedy described the human condition as “rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation...”

Ted Johnson quoted those six words at a red light and asked me who’d said them. I looked through a cracked windshield at a desolated row of half-dead buildings and had to guess Martin Luther King but I was wrong.

What did I think? I didn’t really know. I knew Ted was proud of getting me a long interview but it had all been a bit too Baptist for me, too magical-religious.

Barack Obama, America’s first black President

Dan MacLeod
Some Real
Intercultural “Bloopers” in the World of Marketing

Marketing people are by nature creative, always looking for ways to attract the attention of potential customers. And when a marketing campaign is successful, manufacturers immediately want to export it to other countries. Unfortunately, the literal translation of an ad can sometimes lead to serious intercultural misunderstandings, as the following examples make clear.

1. Orange
During its 1994 launch campaign, the telecom company Orange had to change its highly successful logo “The future’s bright ... the future’s Orange” in Northern Ireland. Many people perceived this as the Orange Order, which suggested that the future was Protestant, loyalist. As you could imagine, it didn’t go down well with the Catholic Irish population.

2. Kentucky Fried Chicken
When American fast food giant Kentucky Fried Chicken opened their first restaurant in Beijing in 1987, they accidentally mistranslated KFC’s famous slogan, “Finger-lickin’ good” to “We’ll Eat Your Fingers Off!” in Chinese.

3. Mazda Laputa
The Mazda Laputa is a car from Mazda in Japan. The Laputa was introduced in 1999 as a sort of SUV/kei car mix. The name turned out to be unfit for Portuguese and Spanish-speaking countries, since “la puta” in Spanish means literally “the whore.”
Intercultural marketing
“Bloopers” — continued

4. Parker Pen
Parker Pen’s famous slogan “It won’t leak in your pocket and embarrass you” was translated into Spanish and confused many Mexican consumers who read it as, “it won’t leak in your pocket and make you pregnant.”

5. Pepsi
When Pepsi started marketing its products in China a few years back, they translated their slogan, “Pepsi Brings You Back to Life” pretty literally. The slogan in Chinese really meant, “Pepsi Brings Your Ancestors Back from the Grave.”

6. Big Mac
The Big Mac was originally sold in France under the name Gros Mec. In French, that translates as “big pimp”.

7. Texican Whopper
When this ad was published in Spain, the ambassador of Mexico in Spain issued a formal protest to Burger King and asked the company to pull the ad as well as apologize for offending Mexican cuisine. The poster shows the short wrestler wearing the Mexican flag as a cloak (disrespect to the Mexican flag is considered an offense in Mexico). And the Texican is described “the taste of Texas with a little spicy Mexican.”
8. Mont Blanc & Gandhi
Not only was Gandhi passionately opposed to the British colonial rule in India, but he believed in frugality. Well-educated upwardly mobile Indians, the target market for luxury brands, may be attracted to luxury but were not pleased with the ad from Mont Blanc.

9. Benetton
Benetton’s advertising campaign was meant to provoke and it played with cultural taboos. Their campaign brought them attention, prizes and controversy. In Poland, however, with a conservative Catholic population, no other motif could create more resentment than a picture of a priest kissing a nun.

10. ‘Got Milk’ Campaign
In the early 1990s the California milk industry’s increasing concerns with sinking sales lead them to launch a new publicity campaign. They created the slogan “got milk?” and it became the most successful campaign ever. But in Spanish speaking populations it had no success at all. Translated into Spanish the slogan sounds like “¿Tienes leche?” — meaning “are you giving milk”. Later the slogan was changed to “milk” or “leche”. 
Book Review
Culture Shock! Finland
A Survival Guide to Customs Etiquette

by Debbie Swallow
U.S.$ 15.95, 302 pages
Published by Marshall Cavendish Corporation

One of the more attractive features of a Culture Shock series is generally the personal perspective of the authors. One often has the sense of being taken by the hand and shown around a new and unfamiliar environment with the sense of well-being and safety one enjoys in the presence of a seasoned tour guide. This volume on Finland by Deborah Swallow is no exception. Swallow seems at home with and always on good terms with her Finnish hosts via her writing.

For most of us the image of Finland is that of a peaceful, forested, often snowy, out of the way countryside in which to plan a hike, some cross-country skiing or a fishing trip. The opening chapter on first impressions, written from the point of view of things that happened to the author and are likely to happen to you in discovering Finland, is at once reassuring and eye opening.

Finland, unlike many places in the world, besides the quiet demeanor of its people and the impossibility of its language, has few truly negative stereotypes to live down. So, it is likely to come as a shock to some readers to discover that it is a relatively new country with a still recent memory of warfare, political insecurity and a polluted environment. Growing insecurity, ethnocentrism and xenophobia do show up even in this well-regulated and well-intended society.

Finns have contributed substantially to European and world culture, however the barrier of language has restricted our familiarity with this literary tradition. Swallow does spend a chapter talking about the language and literature and gives a brief introduction into what is a very melodious and expressive tongue.

There is a chapter on working in Finland that includes advice about communication, negotiation and the etiquette required to interact productively in this environment. The book closes with a summary of “fast facts,” and a culture quiz that helps the reader fix in mind the influence of Finnish values and how they lead to behavior both on the part of the Finns and visitors.

Swallow, who is currently the President of SIETAR Europa, writes with the savvy of an experienced interculturalist, while not abandoning her own British perspective. I found this usually delightful, though I had to google for the occasional Pommy word or phrase that was not part of my Yankee vocabulary.

Reviewed by George Simons
Anne Witte has presented us with quite a readable guide to learning about and using culture in times of great cultural upheaval and transition. Her book deals in a matter-of-fact but information rich way with this dilemma.

To quote the preface, introducing the first part of her book, "... culture is presented as less a question of states and nationalities and more of a series of instances and processes that distinguish some groups from others." This addresses the raging debate as to whether culture is a real and stable entity or near chaotic intersection of individuals, contexts, and objectives, which leads toward skepticism of culture as a concept worthy of attention. In other words she provides an understandable and credible "both/and" position of being and becoming in the place of the paralyzing "either/or" standoff. It is organic rather than dialectical. Seminal issues such as culture itself, and such cultural components as language, authority, and values are explored in this first part.

In the second part of the book Witte looks at the behavior of nations in a globalizing world, the contagion and hybridization of cultural strategies in the face of raging technology and threatened ecosystems. Deliberately opting out of a single disciplinary point of view, she is able to enrich our perspectives from a variety of disciplines, and provides a goodies-sized bibliography to substantiate this. Part 2 deals with transitions, from the cultural to the national, to the post-national, to the post-cultural and the globalized. Again, it puts perspective on how we understand culture as, for example, expressed in this headline in the opening of chapter 6, "Culture is a creative and adaptive force—incompatible with static concepts like ethnicity and territory." The final chapter summarizes the ten critical learnings of the book and raises questions about how we go forward with what we understand as culture and how we will educate for it.

What I like most about Past and Future Culture is the tangibility of the discussion. Closely tied to history, language, and human behavior, and expressed in artifacts, rituals and values, it becomes hard to deny either the power of culture or the complexity of change underway within and between cultures. In this context the past and future of language, intimately connected with how we conceive of, generate and transmit culture, as well as how we understand and misunderstand each other, is concretely dealt with. This is true whether our culture is one that prescribes individual achievement or collective harmony. Witte's book comes closer than most in making us aware of culture as each of us holds it, expresses it, and adapts it and applies it or attempts to reject it in our search to exist.

Reviewed by George Simons
Events, workshops, congresses

**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

**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/

**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/

**Milan, Italy**
15-17 November, 2012
*Constructivist Foundations of Intercultural Comunication: Applying the New Paradigm.* Milton Bennett will hold this seminar that explores constructivist roots, contrasts intercultural assumptions to those of other fields, and examines paradigmatic confusion in applications. This course shows how careful applications of intercultural theory can generate coherent and sustainable training and development. Special attention is given to constructivist/developmental approaches, particularly the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS). 15% discount for SIETAR members. More info at http://www.idrinstitute.org/

**Bath, U.K.**
2-6 July, 24-28 Sept. 2012
*Developing Intercultural Training Skills.* These two 5-day courses are for experienced trainers in language and management training, who want to further develop their skills in course design and delivery or integrate cross-cultural topics into their current courses. The facilitators are Adrian Pilbeam and Phil O’Connor. More information at http://www.lts-training.com/ICTTcourse.htm

**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 3000 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 at diversophy@gmail.com

---

**Editorial**

Fons Trompenaars 2
One of the most influential management thinkers in our time

Empathy and Wealth 8
Social class and caring for others

To Discern Water is to 10
Discern Culture
An atypical intercultural seminar in Milan

From Owens to Obama 11
Going beyond racial ignorance

Intercultural “Bloopers” 15
How marketing people can seriously misunderstand their customers

Book Reviews 18

Events, workshops, congresses 20