

TALARIA INTERCULTURAL INTERACTION SKILLS WORKSHOP

TAKE A PEEK.....

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Acronyms

- TIIS - Talaria Intercultural Interaction Skills, as in TIIS workshop or TIIS model
- TFM – Talaria Facilitation Method
- ICD – Intercultural Competence Development, as in facilitated ICD

The Scene

A group of participants has just completed the first day of a two-day Talaria Intercultural Interaction Skills (TIIS) Workshop. The workshop took place at the global headquarters office of a Fortune 200 company. There were 17 participants comprising the multicultural group. There were two African-Americans - one woman and one man - one Asian-American man, one female American Jew, one Nigerian man, one Sikh Indian man, two Chinese women, one Brazilian man and one Brazilian woman, two Mexican women, and five white mainstream Americans - three women and two men. Ages ranged from the late twenties into the late fifties. Job functions and levels varied, from a business unit VP to project staff engineers. The facilitator's name is Henry.

This document includes select excerpts from the day's proceedings.

Henry Sets the Tone

After a hearty welcome, Henry makes a brief comment to the participants:

I congratulate you all for undertaking a very challenging role - working within an intercultural context. To be successful in that role, you need all of the same abilities as people working in a non-intercultural environment. (with irony) Oh, but by the way you also need to develop that minor competency we call (slightly raising his voice) **managing cultural differences** (a few chuckles in the audience, mostly from those with more intercultural experience). Fluent management of cultural differences is a significant behavior that reflects a relatively high degree of intercultural competence.

No matter what your culture is - or that of your intercultural counterparts - or what your job function and position are, managing cultural differences is a universally needed ability for those doing organizational work involving other cultures. Some of you are multicultural team members, some of you are leaders, some of you are working, not with other national cultures, but with different cultures within your own country. Some of you are going on expatriate assignments or doing business in one particular culture. Sometimes you are responsible for managing just your own behavioral adaptation within an environment of cultural difference. In the case of group and organizational leaders, you have the added responsibility of managing not only your own cultural behavior adaptation, but facilitating the adaptation of others.

Now maybe you are asking yourself what the management of cultural differences looks like. Our focus is on interactions, whether face-to-face or virtual. The purpose of the workshop is to flesh

out what it looks like and what specific skills are needed, and more importantly, for you to practice the skills over the course of our two days together. The skills are represented within a model – the Talaria Intercultural Interaction Skills (TIIS) model.

(Henry then refers participants to a page in their training manual on which the TIIS model is illustrated. There is a listing of the three primary interaction behaviors, with specific skills, 11 in all, that are grouped within the three primary behaviors. Below are the three primary behaviors.)

**Interaction Skills for Managing Cultural Differences
TIIS Model: Three Primary Behaviors**

Together with intercultural counterparts, proactively and openly apply the behaviors below:

Question Assumptions Can switch off “cultural cruise control” – assumes partner values and behaviors to be different until proven otherwise.	Identify and Explain Differences and Similarities Is aware of own cultural values and partners’ cultural values that drive behavior and uses that awareness to navigate through intercultural interactions.	Adapt Behavior Can manage intercultural interactions to the specific needs of the situation. Can identify, plan for and apply needed behavioral adjustments to accomplish organizational goals.
Eleven specific skills	fall under these three primary	behaviors.

In general, the progression from simpler to more complex skills occurs from left to right above.

Henry explains that the workshop objective is to frequently practice these skills during the workshop and then, with use of their job aids, to continue application and skill development back in their workplace – that’s it.

The following five select vignettes occurred during this first workshop day. After this vignette section, I explain the key ingredients of the TIIS recipe and refer back to these sections for illustration purposes. The numbers above each section act as reference points.

Vignette One: Joyce’s Culture Is Included

Henry

1

So, we had a great first three hours. Thanks for all the sharing of your intercultural challenges. Through problem-solving your individual real-world scenarios and the model scenarios I’ve presented, we have already fleshed out four different cultural value dimensions that explain many of the cultural difference tensions and reasons for not accomplishing your work goals. For those of you whose scenarios we have examined, hopefully the suggestions for behavior change will be helpful when you return to the workplace. Also, in both the large and small group discussions, many of you have already been practicing several of the foundational skills from the Intercultural Interaction Skills Model. I thought the role-plays were particularly powerful.

Mona, one of the Mexican participants **2**

It is very helpful when you first model the skill behavior for us to practice in the role-plays. Even when you model it is not easy to do in the role-play. It is so different from what we are used to.

Henry

3

We have had a truly inclusive first three hours. You have been sharing your respective cultures’ typical work process behaviors. In this way, you are getting right into the all-important organizational role of acting as a Cultural Guide for your colleagues. Your ability to act as a Cultural Guide will become more fluent as your interaction skills progress. I think the behaviors identified by those of you from indirect communication cultures and your perceptions and feelings when confronted with direct communication will be helpful to your direct culture colleagues when engaging in the work processes put forward in our scenarios this morning – performance management, meeting facilitation, and decision-making. So far, we have been getting into cultural differences by using situations with national culture differences. But of course there are many types of difference, including gender, generational, functional, and corporate

culture. The TIIS model is universally applicable to all cultural groups. What about diversity within national culture? For example, what about African-American culture here in the U.S.? How many of us white mainstream American culture members can explain how African-American cultural values differ from white mainstream American cultural values (the room is becoming quiet and still)? I've been in meetings with our colleague Joyce (looking and gesturing in the direction of Joyce, an African-American participant). Usually in those meetings, she was the only non-white mainstream American member. Now, in those meetings I couldn't really see anything different between her and the white mainstream Americans except for skin color – but that's just a superficial characteristic (now it is getting extremely quiet and still, except that Joyce is leaning forward and engaging). However, when I see Joyce and several of her female African-American colleagues having lunch in the café, she looks different (Joyce laughs)! How many of us have ever asked our African-American colleagues what it is like to work in a white mainstream American-dominated organization? Further, how many of us have ever changed our behavior to adapt to African-American cultural values? (Now the room is very quiet and still, except for Joyce).

Joyce

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(animated) Yes, you know my teammates ask me if I like Bon Jovi but they don't ask me about Al Green! (smiling and chuckling).

(The participants remain quiet and still, not knowing quite what to do, and then after about seven seconds of silence, Abra, the Jewish participant, says with levity, "Can somebody please call HR!?" The whole group - well almost the whole group - erupts into the laughter of relief and amusement).

Henry

5

You know, I have been reading this great book entitled *Black and White Styles in Conflict* by Thomas Kochman. I didn't really know much about African-American culture myself, and so I have been researching it by reading this book and then checking my new learning over lunch with African-American colleagues. One point Kochman makes is that, in general, African-American culture typically values a more direct style of communication than mainstream white American culture. He goes on to explain many African-Americans believe not only should you openly disagree when you are a member of a group, but you have the obligation to do so. What's your take on the typical African-American perspective toward disagreement Joyce?

Joyce

6

Yes, much of the time in meetings here, I feel I need to tone down my input and try to keep things smooth. It can stifle me and sometimes prevents me from bringing out new ideas or different views because I think they might be too controversial....but there's also a gender bias I feel getting in the way as well.

Henry

7

Thanks Joyce. Well, this discussion will get us more deeply into the dominant/nondominant culture dynamics I mentioned earlier. Let's break for lunch first and resume this afterward. Thank you all for your very active participation this morning.

Vignette Two: Aanand's Turban

Henry

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Well, we have about 90 minutes left today. On day two, we will continue to focus on observing me model and you practicing the skill "proactively and openly recognize and explain cultural differences during counterpart interactions." In addition, I will ask you to increase your practice of the empathy skill.

Here in the headquarters office, there are pretty much unlimited opportunities to apply the intercultural interaction skills model. When most members of the organization reach a fluent skill level, you will have the capacity to recognize and explain cultural differences and then collaborate to reconcile the differences and determine the adaptation needed among group members to achieve your work goals. You will all be skilled Cultural Guides for each other. I will have worked myself out of a job! (mild laughter among the group). We saw this capacity with the exemplary performer characters in the scenarios I presented earlier today.

Currently, the level of intercultural interaction skill worldwide is relatively low. In order to accelerate skill development there is a need to take a proactive approach to interactions. Now, Aanand, our *Sikh* colleague, is here participating today (looks toward Aanand). And of course there are other *Sikh* colleagues who you see walking through the halls every day. There is one very distinctive characteristic that all of our *Sikh* colleagues have in common. And – this characteristic is not shared by any single member of any other cultural group represented in this company location. So, it seems like this would be a remarkable characteristic – remarkable in a literal way – upon encountering this characteristic, it seems natural to me that a person from a non-*Sikh* culture would remark upon this characteristic in some way, perhaps by way of a question. How many of you in the group have approached any of our *Sikh* colleagues with a question like the following: (addressing Aanand) Aanand, I notice that you and our other *Sikh* colleagues always wear a turban to work. Would you mind telling us about why you wear a turban and what it means? (Addressing the group again) Has anyone done this sort of thing before? (It becomes still and quiet again, though not as much as earlier in the day. After about five seconds, Henry continues.) I was thinking this might be the case – that nobody had done so. It is natural in our current state of organizational intercultural competence. Culture is almost like the “elephant in the room.” (Addressing the non-Americans) That idiom means that cultural differences are a huge presence at times in our work together (as huge as an elephant) but that people are reluctant to identify this presence. So, what’s the reason for not asking? (again about 7 seconds of silence.)

Jonathan, a white mainstream American 9
(Quietly) We are afraid we might offend someone.

Henry 10
(Histrionically with humorous mock exasperation) Exactly! We are afraid of offense, insult, disrespect and any other assortment of negative outcomes. Why is this? Our culture is perhaps the largest influence on who we are! Do we think that there might be something wrong with the *Sikh* religion? Do we think that Aanand might be embarrassed by the wearing of his turban?! Ten years from now, when people in this company look back on today’s state of intercultural competence, they may say something like, “You know, back then people were hesitant to proactively and openly talk about cultural differences. Can you imagine?” Where does this fear of offense come from?

Jonathan 11
In America, we are taught to be the same as everyone else, to treat everyone the same, and become a part of the herd. So when you specifically recognize one of those differences, you set that person outside of the group, and that sets them apart.

Henry 12
Jonathan’s comment would seem to indicate that we have been conditioned to value similarities and ignore differences. You may or may not agree with his perception, but there is often a tendency to focus on the similarities more than the differences with intercultural counterparts. This sounds like a good idea, but when we over-emphasize the similarities, the differences remain hidden, limiting our ability to value them – you can’t value something you can’t see. Please go to your manual and read the Valuing Differences article.

[Go to the Readings tab on this website to see the article, Valuing Differences, to which Henry refers].

So, Aanand (looking at Aanand again) what about it? Would you care to share information about your turban?

Aanand 13
(With a wide grin) I’d love to! (He goes on for about 10 minutes, explaining a variety of information about turban wearing and being *Sikh*).

Henry

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Great, thanks a lot Aanand. Now we have included Aanand's culture in our session! This is part of what intercultural competence looks like and will be more and more widely experienced as global organizations learn to better manage cultural differences through fluent application of intercultural interaction skills.

What's often missing these days, regarding diversity and inclusion practices, is that we include nondominant-culture individuals' physical presence and then celebrate that as inclusive behavior. However, their culture is often not included. They are often accommodating to the dominant culture. What benefit is there to including people from other cultures if they are basically acting the same way as the dominant culture members?! This is the typical dynamic happening today, that is until people attend this workshop! (laughter from group).

Another reason for not asking about another's culture is that dominant culture members often aren't aware that there are differences. For example, when Aanand, Joyce and other nondominant culture members interact with dominant white mainstream American culture members, they often accommodate to the mainstream culture's behaviors – doing what the dominant culture does to get along and to get things done. When the similarities are over-emphasized, deeper cultural differences remain hidden and these differences often surface in the form of miscommunication, subtle tension, cordial trust instead of authentic trust and a lack of agility in the accomplishment of tasks and work outcomes. For example, last week I facilitated a workshop in which an Asian participant commented that he didn't really get any substantive work done for the first two weeks he was here. He went on to explain that his American manager gave him very little direction at first and said that his door was always open. So, the Asian guy kept waiting for his manager to call him back and give him more detailed instructions and to explain his role in more detail. When his manager didn't get back to him, he was puzzled and concerned. In his hierarchical culture, usually the manager will initiate interactions and more closely monitor employees compared to our egalitarian performance management behaviors here in the United States. Every day in dozens of multicultural organizations, this kind of mistaken interaction is happening. It can result in loss of productivity, efficiency and morale.

Judith, a white mainstream American **15**

But aren't we including people of other cultures just by virtue of them having a seat at the table?

Henry

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Yes, that's partly true. And this organization, like many, has come a ways in its organizational practices, such as hiring for example. You only need to walk around the buildings here for ten minutes or so and the outward diversity is apparent. Let me make a statement for your reaction: One perspective on the "seat at the table" idea is that it includes people from other cultures' physical presence, but not necessarily their culture. (Henry walks over and stands next to Aanand). We may think that we are valuing cultural differences and have achieved diversity simply from the fact that people of different cultures are present together at a meeting. Granted, presence together at a meeting positively affects intercultural relations, but it doesn't help us value differences unless we look deeper below the surface to learn what the differences are. I may be sitting next to Aanand at a meeting. I see that he has darker skin color than mine, is wearing a turban, grew up in a different country, and has a religion different from mine. What do I really know about him though? These are merely facts about him, superficial pieces of information. How well do I know him in a meaningful way – in a way that would help us reach a higher quality work result, in a way that I could begin to value and appreciate his cultural values that are different from mine? How well do I understand Aanand's cultural values, his culture's typical business behavior during meetings, negotiations, presenting new ideas, managing a project, managing performance, leadership styles and communication styles? Might his culture's approach to project management work better than mine in our current work context? Do I know whether or not he believes hierarchical relations are the right way to handle power and authority? What are his views on our approach to change – does he believe that a risk orientation is right, or that a restraint orientation with its resultant behaviors is right? If we are involved in an innovation project that would be critical to know! And what about communication? Does he think it is good and more effective to communicate directly or indirectly? Until I know these things about him and the differences between us, our relationship will lack depth. Our trust level may be characterized as cordial rather than authentic and deep. Most importantly, how can we know which of the values will drive our work together and who needs to adapt their behavior in the relationship and how? Sooner or later, if

these differences are not identified, we increase our risk of business failure and heightened tension between us – if not business failure, then at the least we are likely missing opportunities to make our work more productive, efficient and of higher quality.

Vignette 3: Aanand’s Message - “America, Love It or Leave It.”

Aanand

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(Aanand comments after Henry’s lecture above) You know, sometimes when my Indian colleagues and I are talking, they complain about how hard it is sometimes to work with Americans. They say one of the most challenging things is that Americans are cold and don’t care about the people, but only about the job. I always tell them if they don’t like it they should just go back to India.

Henry

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(To the group and Aanand) Thanks for sharing that Aanand. I have a request. What I am about to say may bring some laughter, which is good, but I am seriously making this request of Aanand. (Speaking to Aanand) Aanand, if your Indian colleagues say that kind of thing again, (Henry stops for a few seconds to let participants’ minds wander to what he might say next) please I request of you, don’t ask them to go back to India, but please ask them to attend this workshop (about half the group laughs). What your friends feel and say is completely natural and part of the intercultural competence development process.

You know, tomorrow I will explain in detail to you the Intercultural Development Continuum© and its measurement instrument, the Intercultural Development Inventory® (IDI®).



(The Intercultural Development Inventory and IDI are registered trademarks of IDI, LLC in the United States and other countries. I have obtained a license to use the IDI® from IDI, LLC).

Basically, the IDI measures our responses to cultural difference and commonality. One of the developmental stages is called Polarization. This is a stage in which people have an Us vs. Them mentality. Sometimes they feel that other cultures are better than their own culture and vice-versa. Most people that work in-depth interculturally go through this stage and even if they are past it as a predominant phase, they may intermittently go in and out of it. I know I do. Sometimes after a training program I go home and talk to my wife about those darn Asian participants in the program who are so quiet and don’t contribute (Henry and the group all laugh, including the Asians. Earlier in the program, there was a scenario and problem-solving process around how cultural values impact participation in training programs and presentations. During that activity, Henry had built up rapport with the Asian participants. Humor is a large component of the TIIS workshop). One reason people can get stuck in polarization is that they don’t give themselves permission to feel these perceived negative thoughts. Many of the people with whom I have de-briefed the IDI assessment express relief because they had thought that something was wrong with them for feeling negative about the other culture or their own culture. Do you have values? If you believe some things are right and some wrong, you are bound to have these feelings at some point in the intercultural competence development process. Anyway, we will talk about polarization and the other stages of development tomorrow.

(Sometimes IDI completion is a part of the workshop. When it is, there is a thorough group de-briefing during the workshop as well as follow-up individual de-briefs afterward. In this case – when participants don’t complete the IDI as part of the program – they still learn about it so that they can better understand how intercultural competence fluency is a developmental process).

Vignette Four: A Slice of the Intercultural Interaction Skills (TIIS) Model is Modeled

(At the beginning of the session, there was an introduction activity. Henry asked the participants to briefly introduce themselves and share a challenge they have experienced working with intercultural colleagues. Some of these experience scenarios were de-briefed by Henry. Using specific real-world scenarios from individual group members, he led them through a structured problem-solving process using the Talaria Facilitation Method (TFM). TFM is the core of the multi layered learning and performance process used in the TIIS Workshop. There were three outcomes to each de-briefed scenario: (1) identification and explanation of cultural value differences and other intercultural adaptation dynamics causing the problem, (2) possible style-switching behaviors (style-switching is one of the skills in the TIIS 11-skill model) that could be used to better accomplish the work goals of the situation, and (3) modeling by Henry of select intercultural interaction skills that could be used to reconcile the cultural differences. In addition to the group's own scenarios, Henry uses designed scenarios in the form of written critical incidents, written monologues, live dramatizations and guided visualization throughout the workshop. Right now, Jerome, a white mainstream American participant, shares his situation.)

Jerome

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I was sent on a three-year assignment to our China operation. I have just returned for a two-week stay after my first three months. A big challenge for me and the rest of the expats is managing our Chinese direct reports' performance. I find the dependence on me by my direct reports to be extremely stressful and I have to say it is quite frustrating. I get as many as 15 calls in one day from one of my guys asking me for input or decisions that are well within his authority! My own technical work responsibility is more than a full-time job and then I have all of this time being taken up with supporting my direct reports. Our structure is just not set up for this situation. It's ironic because a large part of our job is to build the capacity of our direct reports so that they can take over more responsibilities. We are also instituting a new customer management strategy that will require everyone to take greater ownership of their entire customer relationship role. I have been encouraging my direct reports now for a month to take more initiative, be more active in meetings, give me feedback on what they need to do their jobs better, come up with new ideas and overall to own their jobs. I try saying it in different ways and in different situations, but it is very slow going. They don't seem to want to take responsibility. I guess this kind of change just takes time...

Henry

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Thanks for sharing that with us Jerome. I want to point out to everyone that the conversation Jerome has started is what the beginning of intercultural interaction skill development looks like. It provides us part of a vision for organizational intercultural competence. Perhaps five years from now, you will walk around this office complex and, just as now, see many meetings in progress. Along with the projector-driven metric charts on the wall, you may hear intercultural audits going on and multicultural team members having conversations like the one that Jerome has started here – a proactive and open discussion about cultural differences and the adaptation needed to reconcile the differences and achieve goals.

(Addressing the group) What comments can you make to Jerome? Thinking about some earlier activities this morning, how might you explain this culturally?

Oghale, the Nigerian male participant

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This kind of situation can be common in my part of the world too. Jerome is acting from egalitarianism (now smiling and laughing a bit) while his Chinese people are fond of the hierarchical relationships (laughter from the group at the term "fond of").

Henry

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Hey, I like that term "fond of!" I think I will change my manual materials using that rather than "valuing." Oghale just applied one of the foundational TIIS skills – explaining differences using intercultural value language.

One response Jerome – I can understand your perception of your Chinese direct reports not wanting to take responsibility. Earlier today, we talked about seeing intercultural interactions through two different lenses – one lens representing your culture and one or more lenses representing the other cultures.

Looking through an egalitarian, independent and risk-tolerant lens, it is natural that their behavior would look like a lack of taking responsibility.

(Julie, one of the Chinese participants, explains how, from a Chinese hierarchical perspective, Jerome's management style could likely be perceived as weak).

Here is another observation. Jerome has been trying in different ways to communicate performance expectations to his direct reports. The thing is, if we think about the words, they mostly reflect the Western values of egalitarianism, independence and risk tolerance. Therefore, we could predict that they are probably abstract and elusive for his Chinese direct reports. Imagine you have gone your whole life growing up in Chinese culture, generally not experiencing instances of independently taking initiative or risks, but instead getting top-down direction from parents, then teachers, and then managers in the workplace. Now, your new American manager is asking you to take these very abstract actions. It is like speaking a foreign language to them. With this lack of any frame of reference for the desired behaviors, participants need to have models of behavior and specific behaviors identified for them. They also need to transition from the personal to the cultural. They need to realize that the difficulty in fulfilling the expectation isn't because of incompetency – it is cultural and that can be changed through a developmental process – just like the developmental process in which we are involved here.

Let me ask you Jerome, how have you been addressing the cultural differences that are involved with this situation?

Jerome

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(laughing) I am attending this session (the rest of the group laughs). Maybe my direct reports should have this kind of program too.

Henry

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Yes, it would be good for them to have this kind of training. Also, your participation in this workshop is an action reflecting an advance in intercultural competence. (To the whole group) Jerome's situation is fairly typical in global companies and this morning we have heard from a few others about similar performance management situations. The situation is reversed, but the same dynamic exists when Western managers are expected to change their management style to be more directive and hierarchically driven. In a few minutes I will set up a scenario for that context. In the typical current state of affairs, intercultural counterparts usually aren't dealing openly and proactively with the cultural differences, which often are the primary impediment to accomplishing the work objectives – in this case the objective is within the performance management process. So, let me present an example scenario acted out in a drama. In the scenario, I will play the character of Michael, a Chinese mid-level manager. He has experience working and living in Canada. In addition, he has participated in the TIIS workshop and so has a relatively high level of intercultural interaction skill (group laughs). I will ask Jonathan to play the role of Ralph, Michael's new American manager. (walks over to Jonathan to hand him the drama's script) Don't worry Jonathan, this is not a role-play. Here are your lines. Just give it as good an acting job as you can. Thanks for doing this. Ralph's only intercultural experience has been a few short-term business trips to China and Taiwan. He has not participated in any facilitated intercultural learning experiences. He pretty much sees the performance management process only through his American cultural lens.

The scenario is as follows: Remember earlier we discussed some of the criteria involved with deciding who should adapt their behavior in the intercultural context. The first consideration is the group's organizational goal. In this scenario, the organization is a Global Fortune 100 company. They have an ambitious strategy for Asia and China, including several hundred foreign expats in China, divided between their dozen locations throughout the country. Let's call the company "Vulcan Enterprises." Their relevant goal for this situation is that one of their strategic mantras is "Unified Vulcan." They are also instituting a new customer management strategy which will require employees to individually take on more job ownership and autonomy during customer interactions. In order to work toward this, they have tasked their expat managers with coaching their Chinese direct reports to act in a more empowered manner. This means greater individual ownership of their jobs. They are expecting their Chinese managers to develop in the areas of initiating their work, taking increased responsibility for decisions (depending on technical capability), and holding themselves accountable for results. In addition to the

organizational goal, a second criteria for the adaptation decision is answering the question, “who can adapt?” Adaptation is an advanced intercultural interaction skill and there are few people in global companies who are fluent in adaptation capability. So, let’s assume that Michael, with his higher skill level, is in a better position to adapt his behavior. Well aware of the organizational goal and Ralph’s relatively low intercultural interaction skill level, Michael approaches Ralph to have a cultural discussion.

Let me ask the rest of you in the group to observe and then share impressions of Michael’s behavior. In particular, look for him applying these two TIIS skills – (points to the whiteboard) – “can reserve judgment and de-personalize interactions by attributing behavior to underlying cultural values” and “can empathize – can take on perspective of intercultural partners and express empathy.”

(Dramatization)

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(Michael enters Ralph’s office)

Ralph: Hi Michael, how are you doing? I appreciate you scheduling a meeting with me. You are the first of the group to do so.

Michael: Hi Ralph. I see you are settling in well (looking around Ralph’s office). I wanted to talk to you about Unified Vulcan and our new customer management strategy related to your role as our group’s leader.

Ralph: Great! What’s up?

Michael: I would like to turn this into an intercultural discussion...what I mean is to not take my feedback personally but to realize that we are talking about cultural differences between American and Chinese cultures.

Ralph: Right, well OK. Well, certainly I know that we have some differences, but deep down below we are all just humans, right?

Michael: I know it seems so and it makes us to feel good thinking so. However, I think the longer you are here, the more you will see the differences and realize they are natural. After all, we are products of our own culture. It is true that we all have large-scale goals in common. In our situation here, we all have goals for the company to grow financially, cut costs and produce high-quality products. In order to achieve these goals, we interact within a lot of work process contexts (Ralph stops Michael).

Ralph: Excuse me Michael, but I have to say that your English is fantastic!

Michael: Well, it still needs a lot of work, but thanks... Anyway, we all want to have good interactions like good decision-making, good meeting facilitation and participation, and good employees by having an effective performance management process. So, what we want is the same, but HOW we get there is different, based on our cultural background. For example, we are going to have a kind of empowerment and engagement approach to employee development here. I experienced that in Canada and it took a while for me to get used to it.

Ralph: Right, that is the direction toward Unified Vulcan.

Michael: I can see the need for that approach, given our flat organizational structure and also our new customer management strategy. The empowerment approach, which is generally used in Canada and the U.S., is based on the cultural value of egalitarianism. In general, most Americans believe that the handling of power is best handled through an egalitarian approach, which reduces the power distance between managers and employees – it is the right and good way to do it in American culture. The opposing value that exists for the most part in China is a hierarchical approach. That is believed to be good and right here.

Ralph: So, here I am stuck in the middle with you (laughing)...

Michael: What?

Ralph: Oh sorry, the situation just reminds me of a popular song in the U.S. (sings the line with melody)

Michael: Oh right! I know that song from a movie, The Reservoir Dogs, right? That's a wild scene.

Ralph: Yea, Tarantino's films are intense....how long did you say you were in Canada?

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Michael: Three years. So, getting back to performance management, I can imagine that you likely see egalitarianism as the good way to manage performance – to instill job ownership, taking initiative, acting independently, and taking responsibility for decisions, for example.

Ralph: What you are saying is very interesting...it is starting to help me see what is going on here.

Michael: Yes, I can imagine you might be frustrated with some of the responses the team has been giving you. It may seem that we don't want to take responsibility. You may possibly view us as incompetent, immature and lacking confidence.

Ralph: Yea, I have been having some negative perceptions. So, how is it for Chinese organizational culture?

Michael: Of course we see the power relationship through a hierarchical perspective, for the most part. That is right and good in the Chinese cultural context. We believe that it is the manager's role to basically own our job – to initiate our work, to make most decisions and to be accountable to the organization for our work. In your terms, it is micro-management, which I know is almost a sin in North America.

Ralph: One thing that is really important to me in this process is that people ask me when they don't understand something in our group meetings. We seem to be wasting a lot of time with people actually not knowing what to do after a meeting, although in the meeting they said that they understood.

Michael: Again, I could imagine that might be maddening for you. This relates to how our relative value on indirect communication style which is carried out in the hierarchical relationship. I should say that going up in the hierarchy the value is indirect, but generally going from top down it can be quite direct.

Ralph: I was just assuming that people don't want to look stupid.

Michael: Well, there may be some element of that, but an aspect of it you probably can't see is that if we ask you a question in the group meeting, it sort of communicates to you and the rest of the group that you haven't done a good job of explaining or giving instruction. Generally in Chinese culture, the boss is supposed to know how to explain everything and give clear direction. So, there could be a loss of face for the boss if he or she is questioned in front of the group. When you become more aware of the values driving our different behavior, then you will more easily see these things.

Ralph: Mmm (reflecting)

Michael: Another thing is that, in our hierarchical context, you usually don't follow up with us and monitor our work enough.

Ralph: Well, I always try to make it clear that my door is always open. I try to be approachable.

Michael: I know. That is the egalitarian in you. In North America, close monitoring by the boss may be perceived as lack of trust. Here, close monitoring means that the manager is fulfilling her role and that she cares about you. What I learned in Canada is that so much of culture is hidden until we become more conscious of its influences!

Ralph: So, do the other guys mention these things to you?

Michael: Well, they don't talk about culture like I do, but they express things like, "I wish Ralph would be a stronger leader." In general, Chinese perceive many of the egalitarian behaviors as weak and ineffectual.

Ralph: It's funny, but in the U.S. I was always known as a strong leader because of my ability to develop and empower my people. I don't know...the thought of close monitoring...it really rubs me the wrong way. Plus, how do we get to Unified Vulcan if we do it this way? It doesn't seem like it would fit with our new customer service strategy either.

Michael: Right! What I learned in Canada is that in global companies we all really need to develop intercultural competence. Part of that development is the ability to act in opposition to your own cultural values. For example, to this day, I still feel uncomfortable with taking risks in the way that North Americans do. But I do it as much as I can when the situation calls for it. What helps is that in organizations we have a common goal and that is what really helps to deal with the ambiguity and discomfort of cultural adaptation. As you develop a greater ability to adapt and you try out the new behaviors it helps you to appreciate the other culture's values more – even though it doesn't change your own values – you actually become more clarified in your own values.

Ralph: That is something hard for me to imagine.

Michael: Yes, I can relate. And what you said about our organizational goals I see the same way. I think we Chinese need to gain a higher degree of individual ownership of our jobs in order to accomplish the Unified Vulcan strategy. But it will be a fairly slow developmental process. It helps a lot when people realize you are not trying to change their culture, but to help them develop a new skill set.

Ralph: Well, you seem to have gained a pretty high degree of intercultural ability from your experience in Canada. How did you do it there? Are there things you learned to do there that I might be able to use here?

Michael: I've been thinking about that. I think there are a few things that can be done. I think it is important to "chunk" the intercultural behavior change for you adapting to Chinese culture and also for the group to adapt to Western culture – work on it in small, easily understandable pieces. I think, as an overall strategy, if you adapt more to some of the Chinese work process behaviors you can establish more credibility with the group. Then, you can use that credibility to facilitate the change in performance of us Chinese.

Ralph: Well, I don't know if I will be facilitating any changes in your performance Michael!

Michael: Well, I always have a lot to learn, but perhaps I am in a good position to be a cultural guide to you and the group. If it's OK with you, we can talk about it in more detail next time we meet.

Ralph: Sounds good Michael. Thanks a lot for bringing this all up. It has been very helpful.

(The drama ends. Henry facilitates a follow-up discussion focusing on the identification and specific interaction skills which the character Michael demonstrated, particularly the empathizing and cultural attribution skills. In the next activity, Henry presents a designed critical incident related to the empathizing and cultural attribution skills and facilitates the follow-up problem-solving discussion using the Talaria Facilitation MethodSM (TFM). In the application stage of the discussion, he asks two pairs of participants to practice the cultural attribution and the cultural empathizing skill in front of the large group and then to receive feedback.)

Vignette 5: Everything You Wanted to Know About Cultural Differences but Were Afraid to Ask

Henry

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Well, we have just a few minutes left today. We will be meeting on Thursday for day two. Are there any more comments or questions before we adjourn, before we stop?

Kylie, an African-American participant 28

I think we should have a session on Thursday entitled “everything you wanted to know about other cultures, but were afraid to ask.” (after a few moments of silence, several members of the group support this suggestion and then the group assents to it).

Henry

Excellent – so let’s start with that first thing Thursday morning. Thanks everyone.

DE-BRIEF OF THE VIGNETTES: INTRODUCTION TO KEY WORKSHOP INGREDIENTS

What you have just read is representative of a specific Talaria Intercultural Interaction Skills workshop, though it went by a different name at the time of the vignette interactions. The vignettes happened and, while the dialogues between facilitator and participants were not verbatim and of course the names were changed, they were very close and represented the events as they happened at the time. So, how in one day did the participants progress from being somewhat fearful and tentative about cultural difference recognition to proactively suggesting a second-day session, that they themselves organized, dedicated solely to speaking with each other about their respective cultural differences and what can be done to reconcile them in order to accomplish organizational goals? Read on...

Getting to Know the Workshop

The vignettes illustrate some of the workshop’s key ingredients, including the following:

- The workshop is an **organizational capacity-building** experience. Individuals, groups, and the organization increase ability to manage cultural difference related challenges as they occur in the moment. They can collaborate with counterparts to recognize and explain cultural differences and similarities and determine adaptation behaviors needed to accomplish organizational goals. The skills also enable employees to continue intercultural competence learning back in the workplace. The workshop actualizes that confounding training term, “learning how to learn.”

Participants realize and practice the indispensable **capacity-building role of Cultural Guide**. They realize that all intercultural counterparts can be seen as Cultural Guides. As they develop their interaction skill fluency, they are, at the same time, establishing their role as cultural guides. During the workshop they also learn and practice the skill of consulting others as cultural guides. This role naturally creates a vibe of reciprocity, both in the workshop and back in the workplace.

- Takes participants into the forest - establishes a **vision** of organizational intercultural competence in the form of managing cultural differences through the use of effective intercultural interaction skills.
- Shows participants the trees - operationalizes the vision with the universally applicable **Talaria Intercultural Interaction Skill (TIIS) Workplace Performance Model**
- Accomplishes the above through a **multi-layered Learning & Performance (L & P) process**, including the following:
 - Performance-based training practices
 - Experiential problem-solving learning methodology

The workshop is facilitated using the Talaria Facilitation Method (TFM). TFM is an original and universal method used by facilitators from any culture to facilitate and structure the discussion phase of experiential problem-solving learning activities with multicultural audiences. TFM encapsulates the integration of performance-based training practices and experiential problem-solving learning methodology.

As I outline on the Welcome page of this website, the means of accomplishing behavior change toward better management of cultural differences is often neglected in our Intercultural

Competence Development (ICD) field and industry. The field has made great progress in the “whats” – content having to do with intercultural competence. Not enough attention is being paid or action being taken on the “how.” You can have all the “whats” in the world, but if you don’t have a learning and performance process that transfers the learning to workplace performance, it is all for naught. If you haven’t done so, please check out the Welcome page for a brief analysis of the University Model vs. the Performance-Based approach.

- **Significant actionable content pieces**, including the following:
 - Actions to reduce negative effects of **dominant/nondominant culture dynamics**
 - Actions that untwist the often confusing and sometimes volatile dynamics of many current **Global Diversity & Inclusion** efforts
 - Head-on approach to cultural difference fear eradication**
 - The Intercultural Development Continuum (IDC©) and its measurement instrument, the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI)®.** Once I learned about the IDI and IDC and became a Qualified Administrator of the online assessment tool, it became nearly impossible for me to do any kind of intercultural competence development work without bringing them into the picture. The workshop format has two options when it comes to the IDI. Some workshops include participants completing the IDI online assessment and using those results as an integral part of the program. When a client chooses not to have participants complete the IDI, I still describe the IDC to participants and refer to it frequently during the workshop. The strongest value of the IDI and IDC is that they help participants to understand the developmental nature of intercultural competence ability. They realize that it is not a matter of characteristics like personality or good intentions, but that basically anyone from any culture can become interculturally competent with enough intercultural experience complemented by adequate facilitated intercultural learning inputs to make meaning of their experience.

Let’s reflect back on the vignettes you just read, going through each to see how the key ingredients were added to the workshop recipe.

Setting the Scene

At the very beginning of the workshop scene, Henry introduces the goal of the workshop. Rather than go through a several-item list of goals – as often happens at the beginning of a training program - he refers participants to the **TIIS skill model behaviors**. In that brief time, he applied two **performance-based training practices** when he set the stage for participant practice of the behaviors both during the workshop and back in the workplace. They practice the same skills in the workshop that they will use back in the workplace.

Practice of the TIIS skills occurs in the following forms:

- During large-group facilitator-guided discussions
- During small-group discussions structured by the facilitator
- Giving feedback to the facilitator when demonstrating TIIS application during dramatizations and large-group discussions
- Giving feedback to other participants when they practice TIIS
- Structured role-plays with feedback from the other participants and the facilitator

In general, the TIIS Workshop, like all **performance-based training**, enables Level Three evaluation – behavior change – to occur. The facilitator can observe participants’ behavior change progression and the participants can observe their own and each other’s progression, which is motivating.

Use of job aids is another key **performance-based training practice**. Henry referred the participants to the TIIS model in their manual. The illustrated model in the manual serves as a job aid. Another common kind of job aid is phraseology examples. For example, one of the workshop job aids is called “intercultural difference discussion door-openers,” listing different kinds of phrases that can be used to initiate intercultural difference discussions. One overall purpose of the workshop, like any performance-based workshop, is to teach participants how to use job aids to assist in development toward fluent

practice of the workplace performance model. This is accomplished by the participants using the same job aids during workshop practice that they use back in the workplace.

Vignette #1: Joyce's Culture Is Included

Significant ingredients of this vignette are **organizational capacity-building, the head-on approach to cultural differences fear, inclusion of diversity through use of TIIS skills, dominant/nondominant culture dynamics, and performance-based training and experiential learning applied through facilitator modeling of TIIS skills.**

In the first paragraph, Henry refers to the opening activity in which all the participants share interculturally challenging situations they have encountered or are currently experiencing. Henry facilitates experiential problem-solving discussions through the Talaria Facilitation Method (TFM) to structure problem-solving discussions around some of the participants' situations. Participants strengthen their overall intercultural problem-solving skills when they participate in TFM. This increased problem-solving ability **builds organizational capacity.** This opening activity also draws participants in and reinforces the **workplace performance context** of the workshop. Henry points attention to the fact that the participants, while engaging in this activity, have been acting as mutual cultural guides for each other. The workshop plays heavily upon the Cultural Guide role as part of the **future vision** of an interculturally competent organization. As participants increase TIIS skill fluency, they learn how to act as a guide. They also learn and practice the TIIS skill related to consulting others as cultural guides. The cultural guide role is another **capacity-building** piece.

In all of the TIIS workshops I have facilitated, the response of the participant group to the head-on approach to cultural differences was very much the same as it is in vignette one. They are not accustomed to this straightforward approach, and yet once they see it demonstrated and once they see that the sky hasn't fallen and there has been no riot incited, there is a great sense of relief. The kind of joke that Jill made to release the tension is very common in the workshop. They see that the head-on approach to the fear and open recognition of the differences are very inclusive acts. Until fear has subsided, facilitated intercultural competence development will likely continue to be slow, as it generally is now in the current state.

The TIIS workshop can be thought of as a Global Diversity and Inclusion workshop. The TIIS skill model is an inclusion tool. It is the foundation for any efforts to improve management of cultural differences. I use it in all of the following global/multicultural learning & performance program contexts: Teams, Leadership, Working with Country Z, Expatriate Mobility, and individual coaching. Application of the skills enables intercultural counterparts to safely and effectively recognize and explain their cultural differences, and collaborate toward adaptation resulting in the accomplishment of group and organizational goals. For many nondominant culture participants, it is often the first time in their organizational setting that they've heard their culture openly explained and dealt with in the context of adaptation. Joyce perked up when Henry made the transition to African-American cultural differences. What more inclusive act is there than openly and proactively recognizing and explaining our cultural differences with our counterparts? To make it even more inclusive, we try to collaborate around how adaptation should occur in order to reconcile the differences and accomplish goals. Henry posed the question of whether or not the dominant culture participants had ever adapted to African-American cultural behaviors. This is consistent with the experiential problem posing learning methodology – identifying a problem scenario to be solved. In this case, the posed problem is that nondominant groups are often changing their cultural behavior to fit in with the dominant group, but dominant groups usually aren't changing their behavior to fit with the nondominant group. For dominant culture participants, the workshop serves as a non-threatening way to learn about nondominant culture participants' experiences. Application of the TIIS behaviors (particularly cultural attribution explanations and generalization language, as opposed to stereotyping language) and the Talaria Facilitation Method's problem-solving framework take out the "finger-pointing toward the dominant culture people" dynamic that can occur in the current generally misguided Diversity and Inclusion state. Nondominant culture groups are not immune to this accusatory vibe either. A female Mexican-American friend of mine says, "I am in the nondominant group and I've felt like fingers were pointing even toward me when I've attended diversity and inclusion-related activities."

Of course, most of the white mainstream workshop participants aren't aware that there are cultural differences between them and African-Americans. In the TIIS workshop they learn about how these cultural differences are generally a part of daily life for most of their African-American colleagues and other nondominant group members. This increases the ability of dominant culture participants to question cultural assumptions, recognize and explain cultural differences, and empathize with intercultural counterparts.

Vignette #2: Aanand's Turban

In the first paragraph, text section #8, Henry sets an expectation for which TIIS skills will be a priority for practice on the second day. This expectation keeps the **job-performance context** of the workshop at the forefront.

In the second paragraph, he provides a slice of **intercultural competence vision** which includes reinforcing the cultural guide role as part of that vision. At the end of the paragraph, Henry mentions "exemplary performer characters in the scenarios" which he presented earlier in the day. This relates to a key aspect of the workshop. The TIIS performance model doesn't make a whole lot of sense to participants simply by seeing the model written down and relating the job aids that are used to effectively implement it. They need a vision of the performance model's effective implementation – what does it look like, what do people say and do, where, when, and why? **The workshop brings the interaction skills performance model to life. Over the course of the two-day workshop, participants experience the performance model being enacted in a variety of forms**, including the following, some of which you are seeing in the sample vignettes:

- Written critical incidents, acted out dramas, participants' own experiences, and role-plays, are all used to exemplify either effective or ineffective performance of the TIIS skills. The exemplary performers in the scenarios who were mentioned by Henry look like the following: Usually they are first shown failing to reach their organizational goals because of intercultural difference reasons. The scenario is de-briefed/discussed within the Talaria experiential problem-solving facilitation method. Then the exemplary performer is shown to be practicing the select relevant TIIS skills to accomplish his/her goal. In current intercultural competence development interventions, intercultural training scenarios are sometimes used to communicate culture-specific style-switching tactics. Similarly, the TIIS workshop uses scenarios to communicate what fluent TIIS skills look like. In the case of the participants' own real-life experiences, the facilitator provides input as to how TIIS could have been used to prevent a failed situation and make it successful or how the skills can be used going forward to remedy a situation.
- Facilitator modeling along with participant reaction and feedback from the start to the finish of the workshop.
- As the workshop unfolds, participant modeling of the TIIS skills progressively increases.
- The workshop works best when there is a mix of intercultural competence levels. Participants who have had experience adapting – even light adaptation – act as a model for participants who have no adaptation experience, or in many cases do not realize the need for it. When more experienced participants share their adaptation stories, the emotional element of the telling is what makes a particularly significant impression on others. The interaction with higher-level participants helps to move lower-level participants out of their difference minimization tendency. The workshop pays attention to lower-level participants by also using pre-designed surface-level adaptation examples, such as adapting to other cultures' social protocol and etiquette practices. Participants also share surface-level differences with the group, such as Joyce did in Vignette One, Section #4.
- Verbal Guided Visualization led by the facilitator.
- Participant practice during discussions and role-plays.

Seeing the performance model presented in all these different forms contributes to the **vision and larger picture** of fluent intercultural interaction skills and managing cultural differences.

You know, most of the things we learn in life emerge from behavioral models – our parents, our friends, teachers and many others. When an employee is promoted to a management position, it is likely that much of his/her style has been influenced by previous managers who acted as role models. How we raise a family and the kinds of intimate relationships we develop are influenced by our family as we grow up. However, who among us grew up listening to our parents talk about managing cultural differences at the dinner table? Well, maybe Edward Hall's family did this, but for the average person anywhere in the world, there was no exposure to these kinds of models. The TIIS workshop provides these kinds of behavioral models in a variety of forms. Participants gain a larger view of intercultural competence development and this in turn contributes to the ability to perform the specific skills – the workshop is a case of the forest for the trees and vice-versa.

Throughout vignette #2, Henry is **spontaneously modeling select TIIS skills**. He is also taking a **head-on straightforward approach toward the fear of cultural differences**. He also brings in repeated short comments about the **future of intercultural competence**. You can see Aanand acting as a **cultural guide**. Through Henry's **application of TIIS skills, the segment becomes very inclusive of Aanand and his culture**.

In text section #12, Henry speaks about the risks involved when over-emphasizing similarities at the expense of not recognizing differences. This is a harbinger of the later examination of the Intercultural Development Continuum. In text section #14, Henry addresses **dominant and nondominant cultural dynamics**. In text section #16, Henry speaks in detail about the **organizational risks** associated with a low level of intercultural interaction skills.

Vignette # 3: Aanand's Message – “America, Love It or Leave It”.

Aanand's comment about telling his Indian colleagues to return to India is significant in two ways:

1. It illustrates the self-revealing and frank discussions which occur in the workshop. With the TIIS skills as a tool for intercultural difference discussion, and the straightforward and head-on approach to cultural differences fear, participants feel relieved and there is a general opening up on their parts.
2. Aanand's comment provided conditions for a spontaneous lecturette on Henry's part regarding the polarization orientation of the Intercultural Development Continuum. It was, in effect, a spontaneous **experiential learning experience** for the participants. At the time of Aanand's comment, they felt some emotion around it and also they shared in his experience, probably thinking about what they would do in the same situation. Those engaging factors then contributed to the group's readiness to learn about an underlying causal dynamic.

Vignette #4: A Slice of the TIIS Model is Modeled

In text sections # 20 and 21, Henry **positively reinforces the TIIS skills exhibited** by both Jerome and Oghale. This is a standard dynamic in the workshop. As they practice, participants are motivated by evidence of their skill development within the workshop. The facilitator regularly recognizes effective skill application. This **performance-based training** element helps contribute to a relatively **higher degree of workplace learning transfer** than the university approach to learning and development in which information is provided in the program and participants are expected to apply it back in the workplace.

In text section # 22, Henry provides conceptual content. This provision was initiated by Jerome sharing his experience. This again is an example of spontaneous experiential learning. Since most participants have probably projected themselves into Jerome's situation, they are emotionally and cognitively more ready to internalize the content than if the content had been initiated by a PPT slide within a larger linear slide presentation. This rampant over-use of PPT slides, along with the often ineffective or non-use of experiential problem-solving learning activities, has contributed to sucking the emotional aspect right out of many training programs. This is a problem because the complexities of cultural adaptation are more in the gut than the head. The university approach is generally ineffective in dealing with the emotional element.

David Hoopes and Margaret Pusch, got into this on page 106 in their 1979 pioneering book, *Teaching Strategies: the Methods and Techniques of Cross-Cultural Training*:

It is at the affective level that the learning must take place if it is to have an impact on behavior—the ultimate aim of the educational experience.

This was written 36 years ago and is as true today as it was then. I usually feel though, that the field has gone backward in this regard.

Also, **Henry demonstrates the TIIS empathy skill**, which will be further reinforced during a dramatization between the characters Michael and Ralph.

In text section #24, Henry refers participants to their TIIS model job aid in their training manuals. The **use of job aids, a performance-based practice**, is reinforced throughout the workshop. At some point in every workshop, the facilitator instructs participants on how job aids are used back in the workplace and they practice using the job aids during the workshop.

Text section #25 illustrates several key TIIS skills being modeled by the character Michael as he leads a cultural adaptation discussion with the character, Ralph. Overall, the Michael character demonstrates the ability to move Ralph from a personal to a cultural discussion. I say “move” because the Ralph character is in the early stages of intercultural competence development— he probably has not developed fluency in even questioning cultural assumptions yet. So, Michael could expect just a small movement for Ralph toward a cultural discussion. Usually, participants observing this kind of dramatization in the workshop have not experienced anything like it; the proactive and open discussion of cultural differences and its straightforward way of overcoming the fear and hesitation involved with cultural difference discussions.

Vignette #5: Everything You Wanted To Know About Cultural Differences, but Were Afraid to Ask

This vignette illustrates the **overcoming of cultural difference fear and reticence**. From the very beginning of every workshop, participants experience the TIIS model. The facilitator models the skills at every turn and participants observe the skills being applied by exemplary performer characters in critical incidents and guided visualizations. Very early on the participants themselves start practicing the skills during discussions and role-plays. One of the skills in the model is “cultural attribution” – the ability to recognize and explain behavior in cultural terms. A common dynamic occurs during early role-plays and discussions in which participants avoid the C word (culture) seemingly like the plague. They try to explain scenarios of workplace problems caused by cultural differences in as many ways as they can without the saying the word “culture.”

This dynamic also occurred with the group in vignette #5. However, at the end of the first workshop day, they had made significant progress and greatly increased their capacity to openly and proactively recognize and explain cultural differences. One of the participants suggested that they start out on day two of the workshop with a session entitled “everything you always wanted to know about other cultures but were afraid to ask.” The rest of the group enthusiastically assented and the session on the second day was fantastic. By applying several of the foundational TIIS skills (it is a progressive model, building from foundational to more complex skills) they were able to break down their initial uncertainty and fears of proactively and openly explaining cultural differences. That session was marked by the humor that emerges from bringing something fearful out into the open and thereby defusing its detrimental influences. They had swept out the eggshells on which they had previously been walking when it came to cultural differences. This humor derived from relief has been a common dynamic in all of the TIIS workshops.

SUMMARY DESCRIPTION

The Talaria Intercultural Interaction Skills (TIIS) Workshop is a capacity-building and job-based performance improvement program. Participants accelerate behavioral intercultural competence through development of a specific and concrete set of culture-general and universally applicable interaction skills.

These skills comprise the Talaria Intercultural Interaction Skills (TIIS) model, which is the foundation of the workshop. Skill application in the workplace leads to effective management of cultural differences.

The skills model is comprehensive but compact enough to be communicated and practiced within the time and scope of learning & performance programs. After engaging in the workshop, participants are equipped to go back to the intercultural workplace and independently work toward skill fluency.

The model consists of three primary interaction behaviors. The three primary behaviors are broken down into eleven specific skills. The table below represents this categorization (shown also on page two of this document):

**Interaction Skills for Managing Cultural Differences
TIIS Model: Three Primary Behaviors**

Together with intercultural counterparts, proactively and openly apply the behaviors below:

Question Assumptions	Identify and Explain Differences and Similarities	Adapt Behavior
Can switch off “cultural cruise control” – assumes partner values and behaviors to be different until proven otherwise.	Is aware of own cultural values and partners’ cultural values that drive behavior and uses that awareness to navigate through intercultural interactions.	Can manage intercultural interactions to the specific needs of the situation. Can identify, plan for and apply needed behavioral adjustments to accomplish organizational goals.
Eleven specific skills	fall under these three primary	behaviors.

In general, the progression from simpler to more complex skills occurs from left to right above.

When participants develop a relatively fluent interaction skill level, they are better able to proactively and openly collaborate with counterparts in questioning cultural assumptions, recognizing and explaining cultural differences and similarities, and determining the nature of adaptation (who should adapt and how and why) required in order to achieve organizational goals.

Failure to reach organizational goals can have many causes. Intercultural interaction skills enable counterparts to isolate the cultural difference factors hindering goal achievement so that they can better see their way through to the business problem at hand and adapt accordingly. Cultural differences occur within all organizational human interaction processes such as decision making, meeting facilitation and participation, problem solving, team communication processes, and conflict management. For example, in the workshop vignette #4 excerpt you read, Jerome and his other global assignee colleagues were unable to achieve their performance management goals in their organization’s China location. Their goals were basically to facilitate their Chinese managers’ performance development to result in empowered and independently functioning employees. This performance need stemmed directly from their business need – to have skilled employees that can execute a new customer service strategy requiring a high level of autonomy. The Intercultural Interaction Skills that Henry demonstrated (as the character Michael) during the dramatization discussion with his boss, Ralph, enabled him to zero in on both the performance-management cultural differences involved and the business goal. See text section #25.

The interaction skills are universally applicable across cultures, job functions, and organizations. They also cut across all intercultural interaction contexts, including leadership, teamwork, international assignments, and working with specific cultures. Many past TIIS Workshop participants have remarked that they would have benefitted more from prior participation in training programs such as Global Leadership, Global Teams, Working with culture Z, Global Diversity and Inclusion, Virtual Teams, Working in a matrix, and Global Mobility training programs if they had experienced the TIIS workshop first. I’ve used the TIIS skills as the workplace performance model and foundation in all of the program types mentioned above. I also use TIIS when consulting with individuals and small groups around specific cultural difference management problems.

Bringing the Model to Life

As for the TIIS workshop, the model is brought to life by enactment in a variety of forms throughout the workshop. Through engagement in these activities, the individual skills become more understandable

and more fluently practiced. As this happens, the participants also move toward realizing the interconnected and progressive nature of the model's skills. This in turn increases their big picture understanding of intercultural competence's business and organizational role – a vision of intercultural competence.

Thanks for reading.