

## MANY MULTICULTURAL ORGANIZATIONS AND INDIVIDUALS TODAY DO NOT VALUE CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

Can you imagine any multicultural organization today expressing the following statement?

We do not value cultural differences.

The thought of it is of course laughable. The great majority of organizations today express the opposite as a value:

We value cultural differences [or diversity].

I would be impressed by an organization making the following statement:

We are working hard and making progress on valuing cultural differences.

Some organizations and individuals understand the complexity of the above statements. Most do not. While most people everywhere value the idea of cultural differences, the reality is that most individuals, groups, and organizations do not actually value cultural differences to any large degree. There is no conscious intention in this. They don't value cultural differences because they are often unable to see and identify cultural differences that exist in the workplace.

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You can't value something you can't see or identify.

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### Surface and Deep Culture

People everywhere can generally see the visible surface part of culture. This includes dress, language, food, social and business etiquette, and time differences. Deep culture is hidden from most people because they have not developed a level of consciousness which enables this deep culture view. Deep culture's primary characteristic is values; beliefs about what is good and bad, right and wrong. It is these beliefs that drive visible surface work and social behavior.

Once people can identify and explain their intercultural counterparts' work behavior from a deep cultural perspective, relationships consisting of authentic trust can begin to be established. Ability to adapt to cultural differences is developed. This leads to increased success in accomplishing work goals together and the true valuing of their differences with each other. There is a need to go beyond surface differences like skin color and country of origin.

Reinart, a Talaria Intercultural associate, puts it in the following terms:

*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 to learn what the differences are. I may be sitting next to an Indian Sikh 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 my Sikh colleague'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. 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 and efficient. .*

Without differences there is no adaptation.

Adaptation occurs in the realm of difference. Fluent adaptation ability is the highest level of intercultural skill, and it can only be found within the gaps between differences. Meaning lies in the difference gap. Meaning is created through learning. Learning is minimal within the search for cultural value similarities. In the recognition and acceptance of differences, we are forced to learn - about counterparts and ourselves.

When we openly and proactively recognize someone else's cultural values and resultant behaviors, it is a deep validation of them as a person and a significant act of inclusion.

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What could be more inclusive than proactively and openly recognizing the cultural differences between us and our intercultural counterparts? It is only through this open recognition that we can then collaboratively work out how to reconcile the differences in order to maximize achievement of our joint goals.

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The goal is to openly and proactively recognize and discuss cultural differences, and then have an open dialogue about the need for behavior adaptation among counterparts, determining the most effective approach for achieving goals. Toward this end, Talaria Intercultural facilitates the Intercultural Interaction Skills Workshop<sup>SM</sup> and the Talaria Facilitation Method Workshop<sup>SM</sup>.