

Cultural Complementarity -- What Is It?

Cultural Complementarity is a process of awareness that leads practitioners from the traditional mindset of fear of cultural differences to one that envisions enrichment and synergism. Culture reflects the way in which groups and societies perceive and manage reality. Since cultures have different perceptions of reality, their collective view can be by far superior to that of any individual culture and lead to improvements in the management of reality. CC is not restricted to ethnic cultures or relations between a dominant and minority cultures; it encompasses these as well as national, organizational, and disciplinary (engineering, marketing, etc.) cultures.

Niels Bohr's Principle of Complementarity, along with Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle, led to Quantum Mechanics and the realization that observations of electrons as waves or particles depend upon the perspective of and method used by the observer and are complementary to our understanding of those units. In like manner, CC leads us to realize that: a) there is a dimension of reality in which win-win rather than win-lose scenarios can be created and b) we can better understand and manage paradoxical situations when we have multiple cultural perspectives from which to observe them.

Cultural Complementarity -- Why Is It Important?

Internationally, the force of globalization is creating both opportunities and dilemmas for the United States, for other countries and for organizations. Those opportunities are evident in education and business and are derived from economic growth.

In terms of problems, there has been a large increase in undocumented migration from poor to wealthy nations, international drug-trafficking, terrorism and the consequences of global warming. The economies of the U.S. and other nations have suffered dramatically through the acceleration and magnification of dysfunctional practices, which were less noticeable in a pre-globalized context.

Domestically, corporations have to face a more complex and unpredictable world. The makeup of the American population is becoming increasingly diverse as new immigrant groups arrive and the proportion of minorities continues to rise. Governments and corporations strive to deal effectively with diverse populations and economic and environmental unpredictability; however, these attempts are often treated as an obligation... a necessary cost.

CC can significantly help manage the forces of globalization, optimize the visible opportunities, improve the prevention and correction of said problems and disclose less obvious opportunities.

CC offers a positive alternative to the burden of diversity and uncertainty and to unfounded fear. Rather than representing costs and threats, diversity and uncertainty can become assets through CC. Governments and corporations can generate creativity, open new markets, develop new products and services, and greatly energize their workforces. Governments can realize new economic development opportunities, enhance civic engagement, and revitalize social capital; corporations can increase teamwork and innovation.

Other Benefits of CC

Cultural Complementarity can:

- Help corporate and government leaders better understand and manage globalization
- Harness the forces of diversity and complexity to create synergism
- Transform cultural diversity into corporate, social and global capital
- Replace the fear of differences with the enthusiasm of probabilities and cooperation
- Recognize key barriers to collaboration and help build bridges over them
- Move beyond obligation and fear to capitalizing on socioeconomic and environmental challenges
- Help reduce disparities between the extremely rich and the extremely poor

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EXCERPT FROM BOOK "CLASH OR COMPLEMENTARITY OF CULTURES?" BY HECTOR GARCIA

Problem solving is a pivotal element of cultures and life. In this area as well, *Cultural Complementarity* has a significant value. Abraham Maslow, the famous psychologist, said that all problems begin to look like nails to those whose best tool is a hammer. The consequences of this human tendency can be disastrous. For example, the European American hammer of precision, excellent in the field of technology, can be quite detrimental in personal relations. Meanwhile, the improvisation tool of Latin Americans, while successful because of its spontaneity in personal relations can be equally detrimental in technology. Nevertheless, each group, in different times and settings, has insisted on using its tool in areas in which its usefulness is nonexistent or counterproductive. The use of both tools by mixed cultures in the appropriate settings will obviously make for an improved toolbox in resolving problems; neither is superior nor inferior overall but complementary in the pursuit of a common goal. The inferiority and superiority of both tools are defined by the purpose to which they are applied. Given the larger scope of the uncertain future and potential of unique human excellence, the two can be considered as complementary.

Cultural Complementarity allows a community to make use of all tools in its cultural toolbox. Some of the benefits of combining cultural perspectives are that the group's or the corporate's resources are multiplied and a sense of contribution and value is assigned to all its cultural groups; from these two benefits arise synergism and a spirit of teamwork. If cultural groups in a nation or corporation realize that each of their unique assets are recognized as constructive, respectful communication and trust will evolve among them; this will lead to creative and complementary use of the sum of their cultural resources. It is not difficult to foresee how the results derived from this mindset will be more productive than the ones derived from our current one in which we expect to feel better because others are feeling worse or in which we consider ourselves right by proving others wrong...

If we do not assume a priori that one given culture must be superior, except within a limited scope of circumstances in time and space, but assume instead that all cultures are seeking together a deeper understanding of reality and its better management, automatically multiple options of cooperation will surface. This is akin to the magnified perception of routes to the Orient from Europe, once it became evident that the earth was round; among other benefits, greater creativity became necessary to determine the best means possible to circumnavigate the world. This increased number of options then creates the need for dialogue and cooperation. Simplistic perceptions derived from the visions of a flat earth, of a master race or of a dictatorship call for simplistic rules, commands and force; larger and more complex perceptions such as those behind democratic systems call for greater dialogue and cooperation. Dialogue and cooperation are essential to the processing of the *Cultural Complementarity* paradigm.

Cultural Complementarity is an evolving vision... In today's era of globalization, the pragmatic benefits of *Complementarity* are slowly but forcibly becoming evident because of the challenges the world faces. It is imperative that the paradigm be clearly stated, understood and applied.

The book *Virtual Teams* states, "Dean Tjosvold, Professor of Business Administration at Simon Fraser University in Canada, has been at the forefront of team researchers bringing a wealth of learning from hundreds of studies into real-world practice. He reports that myriad studies document this simple fact: Cooperative goals motivate team members." W. Edwards Deming wrote, "If economists understood cooperation, and the loss and damage from competition... they would instead, lead us into optimization through cooperation" (The System of Profound Knowledge, 3/10/1990).

The ultimate goals of different cultures are not different in essence and, thus, they can be unifying: peace, sustenance, shelter, health, and the opportunity to understand, believe and contribute. These goals address the main fears of all of humanity. It is in the strategy, in the cultural forms, that conflict arises. Through *Complementarity*, the differences in cultural approaches to the pursuit of those goals can lead us to effectively surmount our fears and live life more fully. Some specific applications of this mindset in the complexity of today's world and its dilemmas are proposed in the following chapters...

The counter-cultural revolution that women's perspective on life created in business has been acknowledged and praised repeatedly; women's success and participation in high levels of business are evidence that the praise is grounded on fact. Tom Peters wrote in an article for *Working Woman*, "Gone are the days of women succeeding by learning to play men's games. Instead the time has come for men on the move to learn to play women's games..." He added that women are "... better negotiators than men. That's because men focus on wins, losses and competition. Women 'treat negotiation with the context of a continuing relationship'... men and women do take different approaches. Each can learn from the other." This is a clear validation of the *Complementarity* paradigm, which allows us to perceive in the differences of the Other a rich source of effectiveness and creativity rather than a threat.

Konosuke Matsushita, founder of Matsushita Electric, Ltd., stated the following, "Business is now so complex and difficult, the survival of firms so hazardous in an environment increasingly unpredictable, competitive and fraught with danger, that their continued existence depends on the day-to-day mobilization of every ounce of intelligence." Adam Brandenburger, Harvard Business School, and Barry Nalebuff, Yale School of Management, in their book "*Co-opetition*" wrote, "More often than not, the win-lose approach leads to a Pyrrhic victory. Win-lose becomes lose-lose... If fighting to the death destroys the pie, there'll be nothing left to capture—that's lose-lose. By the same token, you can cooperate without having to ignore your self-interest... your success doesn't require others to fail—there can be multiple winners." This book is based on Game Theory, which in 1994 gained three of its pioneers the Nobel Prize of Economics. The Theory of Games and Economic Behavior, a highly sophisticated mathematical and economic concept, which for several decades has molded modern economics in the West, validates the notion that cooperation, intrinsic to *Complementarity*, often produces better results than competition.

The book *Virtual Teams* cites still another example of the more visionary perspective of today's business leaders in regards to cooperation and competition: "In explaining a May 1996 meeting that he and Apple CEO Gil Amelio had attended with Microsoft Chairman Bill Gates, Apple's COO Marco Landi said, "We live in a world where your toughest competitor must be your best partner."

In business, as in intercultural conflict, we fall into the traps of looking for immediate cause and effect, snapshot perceptions of reality, focusing on symptoms, short-term benefits, and "producing a documented view of the future." *Systems thinking* business research done at Massachusetts Institute of Technology indicates that, since cause and effect are not closely related in time and space, causes and processes across time must be identified and addressed. *Systems thinking* also implies that scenarios, which arise from wrong paradigms, cannot work regardless of how hard we try to make them work and that the future will always be uncertain and imperfect... but is always subject to improvement. *Systems thinking* recommends that we focus on interrelationships rather than linear, cause and effect chains and go from the obvious to the subtle. The acceptance of fallibility is intrinsic to *Complementarity*. The *Complementarity* paradigm allows us to move beyond the exclusive perception of linear causality to a comprehensive and evolving perspective.

At the core of *systems thinking* lies the importance of mental models or paradigms. Peter Senge said in *The Fifth Discipline* that *quality management* initiatives at American corporations often failed; managers ended up going through the motions because they would not give up their adversarial mental model. He also presented the example of the American auto industry not wanting to give up principles, which had served it well for years; in spite of the changes taking

place around the world, the industry refused to change those principles because it treated them as "a magic formula for success for all time." It took foreigners, thinking from a different cultural perspective, to see the needs evolving out of a new and different world.

Senge brought up the case of Royal Dutch Shell, which in a period of nine years went from being seventh among the largest international oil companies to join Exxon in an elite class. Senge attributes this leap largely to the fact that Shell realized the leverage behind mental models. *Complementarity*, in its more comprehensive perception of reality, is akin to *systems thinking*. For instance, CC can enable business leaders to integrate multiple perceptions in order to better understand global markets rather than attempting to do it on the basis of a one-dimensional, often nationalistic or provincial, fragmented perception. Realizing the leverage potential of *Complementarity's* paradigm can empower business to attain progress not even envisioned through other paradigms.

In *The Death of Competition*, business leadership and strategy consultant James F. Moore writes, "The traditional way to think about competition is in terms of offers and markets. Your product or service goes up against that of your competitor and one wins.... The problem with this point of view is that it ignores the context—the environment—within which the business lies, and it ignores the need for coevolution (the complex interplay between competitive and cooperative business strategies) with others in that environment, a process that involves cooperation as well as conflict... These companies—such as Intel, Hewlett-Packard, Shell, Wal-Mart... recognize that they live in a rich and dynamic environment of opportunities... new economic wholes from which new businesses, new rules of competition and cooperation, and new industries can emerge." CC, as we have seen in past chapters, discloses such an evolving scenario of potentiality within multiple options, the benefits of greater cooperation and the rationality of thinking in terms of both/and instead of either/or.

The American statistician Edwards Deming was rejected in his own country, the United States, and welcomed by Japan, where he made a revolutionary contribution to the Japanese economic miracle. Eventually Deming's principles of total quality management were accepted by the American auto and other industries. These principles have a strong element of cooperation both within the organization and between the organization and its customers. One of Deming's disciples, the president of the Cadillac division of General Motors, said "competition is the enemy; cooperation is the answer." Computer developer Jay Forrester at MIT said, "The whole idea of having to be competitive starts the thinking off on the wrong track." As explained in previous chapters, *Complementarity* fosters cooperation and enables us to see its viability within circumstances in which we tend to see only the possibility of competition and conflict.

When President Bush criticized the affirmative action program at Michigan State University in early 2003, dozens of CEOs in Fortune 500 firms in the United States publicly countered his position and emphasized the need for increased affirmative action in education to train a diverse workforce and respond adequately to the demands of a multicultural and global market. "If you're going to be a global company and you're going to attract and retain the best people, then the mirror you have to present is that you're a very diverse company," said the CEO of Steelcase Corp. James Hackett. General Mills' counsel said, "... we really need to have... employees that represent our consumers and the population around the world where we do business." A spokesperson for General Motors stated, "... there can be little doubt that racial and ethnic diversity in the senior leadership of the corporate world is crucial to our nation's economic prospects."

It is encouraging that a perspective of *Complementarity* is gaining strength in the corporate sector, where competition until recently reigned supreme. Yet, further change in many corporations needs to take place in order to shift from a mindset of reaction, which calls for diversity to be protected mainly because of moral and legal imperatives, to an intentional one that encourages diversity because of its creativity and potentiality.

In his paper *The Unfreezing of America*, Norwegian economist and productivity guru Tor Dahl, now living in St. Paul, Minnesota, wrote:

"The Quality Revolution has been won. The Productivity Revolution is just beginning... Revolutions often come... when the old ways of doing things no longer work, or when a new paradigm changes our understanding of the world... Productivity improvement is the only way to create new wealth. When productivity increases, so does new wealth creation. To understand productivity, we must understand quality. Quality happens when we *remove* all variation in a product or a service. Productivity happens when we *introduce* variation in a product or service. Quality *freezes* a process, productivity *unfreezes* a process. If we *freeze* first, productivity improvement will drop to zero if no change occurs. If we *unfreeze* first, productivity will increase, and quality will help lock in the gains...

The productivity revolution, as proposed by Tor Dahl, offers significant parallels to the need for the revolution implicit in the CC paradigm. Both are based on a new way of looking at the world. Productivity surfaces from the paradox between quality limitations and performance; it calls for a both/and perspective in contrast to our either/or tendency and for an alternating-flexibility that will keep pace with the changing circumstances of reality. As the productivity revolution evolves out of failures in quality, so the CC paradigm evolves from our long history of failures in human interaction. CC, as productivity, taps into the collective knowledge of different individuals' perspectives across time in order to bring about innovation. Further, *Cultural Complementarity* thrives on the uncertainty of today's globalized reality...