

# 2 KEY VARIABLES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF *ECOTONOS*

Since the early 1980s, the creators of *Ecotonos* have worked with international business teams involved in technology transfer, project management, site construction, product development, sourcing and distribution, marketing, and customer service. Our aim has been to enhance client productivity using an intercultural and systemic perspective. *Ecotonos* is an attempt to condense the core process of our work. Key aspects of that process are outlined below.

## **Task Focus**

We found that a common purpose was often the only motive uniting a multicultural group. People would come together to accomplish certain objectives and, often depending on the outcomes and people's experience of that process, might or might not interact frequently after the task was completed. For purposes of our simulation, we wanted to have the flexibility to tailor the task so that participants could easily identify with it.

## **Real Issues**

In our work we had seen the dangers of labels and stereotypic generalizations. We tried to set up dialogue between people to enable them to learn directly from one another (their beliefs, assumptions, biases, personalities, etc.), and to design their own ways of working together. In designing our simulation, we wanted to get people interacting in ways that came naturally to them, using an overlay of cultural "rules" to make the learning less threatening.

## **Group Process**

We knew from experience that no matter how talented and committed a group might be, its members need to be able to find ways to understand all the information, and to generate previously undiscovered solutions based on a desire to obtain maximum benefit for all concerned. We wanted this simulation to focus on the impact of the problem-solving process, as well as to allow opportunity for alternative problem-solving methods to be introduced and practiced.

## **Personal Effectiveness**

Experience had shown us that there are certain components and patterns of culture that, once learned, allow people to find their own most effective ways to interact in different situations. These patterns are not national, ethnic, or racial stereotypes, but are components that often appear to contradict one another, for example, assertiveness combined with an intuitive, hesitant communication style. We wanted this simulation to utilize these components of culture in random combinations, to allow participants to see the effects of different combinations.

## **Many Types of “Multicultural”**

A minority group member may need different skills than a majority group member, and a member of an extremely diverse group may need different skills than a member of a group representing only two cultures. This simulation, therefore, was designed to provide participants the experience of different types of multicultural situations in order to be able to compare and contrast their experience. Facilitators may have participants form a majority-minority group, a joint-venture group of two cultures represented in equal numbers, and a mixed group of members from all three cultures.

## **Nonstereotypical**

Not every member of a cultural group can agree on the typical characteristics of that group. We wanted to create a simulation that would focus on the skills needed to collaborate across differences, rather than encouraging a debate about which cultures have which characteristics. This simulation was designed with rule cards that are randomly combined and not identified as belonging to any particular group.