

# Cultural Detective®: A Tool for Global Diversity and Inclusion Practices

From the 2009 Linkage Diversity Toolbox

**Kathleen Curran**

**Intercultural Systems**

Building Strategies for Global Business Effectiveness

+65.9758.8483

+1.713.305.8258

[Kathleen@intercultural-systems.com](mailto:Kathleen@intercultural-systems.com)

[www.intercultural-systems.com](http://www.intercultural-systems.com)

Creativity is to Innovation as Diversity is to Inclusion. One is the concept, the good idea; the other is the putting of that good idea into practice.

Valuing diversity and implementing inclusive practices are powerful initiatives that have been shown to produce positive financial impact as well as to make an environment fertile for creativity and fun for collaboration. The graphs below, based on the annual survey undertaken by Great Place to Work (GPW) Institute and Fortune Magazine, show the correlation between trust, cooperation, commitment and the elements of a great place to work as defined by GPW, credibility, respect and fairness, and financial performance.

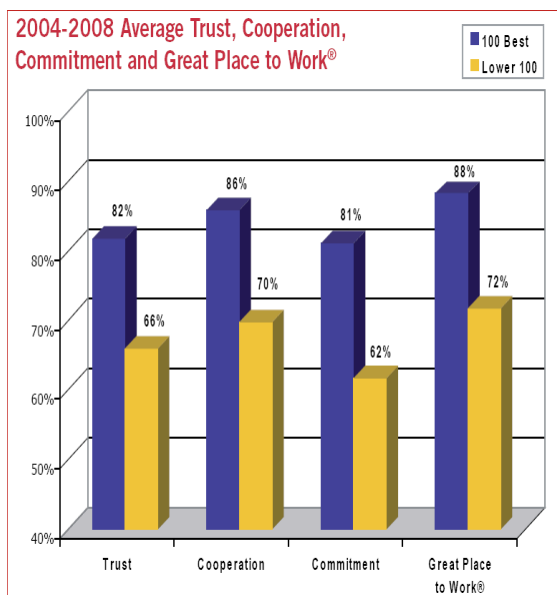


Figure 2

©2008 Great Place to Work® Institute, Inc. All Rights Reserved

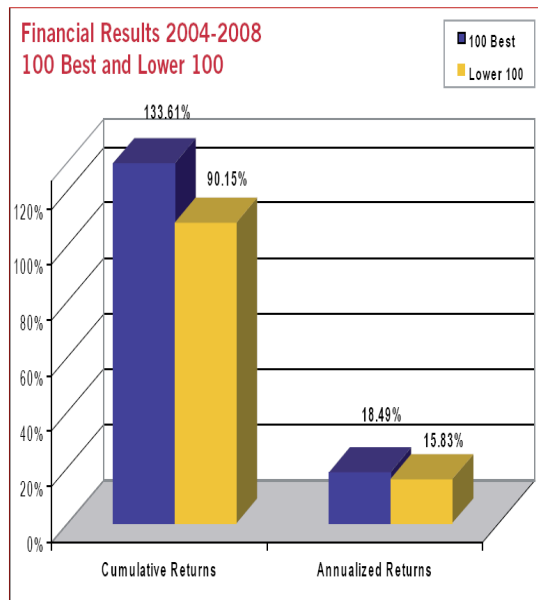


Figure 3

©2008 Great Place to Work® Institute, Inc. All Rights Reserved

David Meister, author of “Practice What You Preach”, reinforces the suggestion that “Employee attitudes clearly cause financial results, rather than the other way around.”

Data supports our intentions, but implementation of good ideas is often the challenge. As Fortune Magazine once wrote, “The real problem isn’t bad strategy; it’s bad execution.”

### **Cultural Detective®: Maximizing Resources by “Seeing” Differently**

Cultural Detective® makes one a detective and like any good detective, proactively on the lookout for significant clues, asking questions and making meaning from what s/he can find. It is a simple, yet powerfully flexible and robust tool for implementing inclusive practices in everyday interactions, as well as for use in the global diversity training room, coaching partnership and project rollout.

Using “case stories”, which require the detective to explore situations and individual behavior + intent, allows one to avoid venturing into stereotyping territory. Each individual is recognized as a composite of many influences stemming from many sources, e.g., national and organizational culture, professional norms, gender, generation, spiritual tradition views—all the ways we can define culture.

The fundamental elements of the Cultural Detective® process enable us to “see” differently:

1. Subjective Culture: Being aware of and understanding one’s own frame of reference, perspective, bias, culturally influenced expectations; in other words, what is in the lens through which I see and experience the world?
2. Cultural Literacy: Recognizing, understanding and accepting another’s perspective, priorities, goals and assumptions; in other words, appreciating that another viewpoint is valid and positive intent is motivating one’s actions.

“Seeing” explicit words and actions, then exploring the implicit and often hidden values and priorities, assumptions and expectations of each party effectively leads to discussion rather than finger pointing, and to creative brainstorming rather than “blamestorming.”

3. Bridging: Together, parties can strategically build bridges that span differences to produce an effective outcome, supportable by all.

This simple and powerful process can be applied as a Just-In-Time discussion process as well as part of a Global Diversity workshop.

### **Sample Activity**

- Form “committees” of 3, whose task it is to award “Outstanding Contributor of the Year” award to a colleague. Provide bios of several colleagues, describing in words and actions the candidate’s track record, which provide data to the committee for possible selection.

(Alternatively, present a case story that includes explicit words and behaviors, expressed by each character in the scenario. Ensure that a work-related goal is suggested, if not made explicit in the case. Just exploring how two people can get along better sometimes is not a strong enough business case for being a Cultural Detective®. )

- Provide magnifying glasses with one value identified in each lens, such as 'loyalty', 'initiative' or 'out of the box thinking'. Have each committee member select one of the magnifying glasses. The lens with the value means that the committee member takes on that attribute and "sees" other's behavior through that lens. For example, if I value loyalty, I will perceive the candidate who has been with the company for 20 years through thick and thin more positively than the newer one, despite other achievements s/he could have made.
- Committee members first individually select the candidate s/he feels is most deserving of the award. The committee then together must reach a final choice.

### **Debrief:**

The objective is to explore (1) how participants dealt with confronting different perspectives and (2) how they built a bridge and reached an outcome together.

#### (1) Exploring perspectives that may be different

- What was your reaction when another choice was different from your view? (E.g., go into competition mode, frustration over extra time needed to persuade another, discomfort because of potential conflict, etc.)
- How did you gain understanding of the other perspectives? (Listen to learn, not persuade. Ask more questions, etc.)

During the discussion, help participants notice when they were inferring or interpreting based on their own viewpoints. Encourage participants to dig beneath the explicit and see each character's behavior through the worldview lens of that individual – his/her priorities, cultural influences, values and "cultural sense".

#### (2) Building bridges

Brainstorm the features of an actual bridge that make it strong and effective. All features of an actual bridge make an effective bridge for a Cultural Detective®.

Participants then develop strategies for how parties in the scenario could accomplish their objectives effectively. In most cases, both individual actions and systemic processes make the best bridges. For example, in the "Outstanding Contributor of the Year" scenario, it becomes apparent that only the goal and outcome have been set out; criteria were not shared, so personal perspectives could easily present conflicting obstacles. An effective bridge proved to be establishing a decision-making process for the committee up front, before assessing candidates.

### **Final Application Questions**

A discussion follows which explores how this process could have been used in a past interaction and how being a Cultural Detective® can be applied to one's work life; how this tool can be used as a tool for recognizing and valuing diversity, and implementing inclusion in their workplace.

- What are your techniques for opening up to “new”? (Step back for a second, seek to understand first, change mindset toward different perspective, etc)
- How does this small group experience apply to your work life? What might you now do differently?

This activity can be done in ½ hour or ½ day. It can be stand alone or part of a larger program. The most significant outcome is when participants begin realizing their own biases as they listen, observe and interact throughout the rest of the program. You know that being a Cultural Detective® will now be a part of their every day practice. And this is what makes Inclusion take root and grow.

NB: Cultural Detective® presently offers more than 50 packages: culture-specific such as China, India, Argentina, USA and global topics such as Global Ethics, Deaf Culture, Gay/Lesbian, Generational Harmony, Islam, and Self-Discovery. Each package includes a Values Lens, a description with examples of each value and its possible negative misperception and a collection of case studies. Please visit [www.culturaldetective.com](http://www.culturaldetective.com)

Kathleen Curran, principal intercultural strategist and founder of Intercultural Systems, is co-author of Cultural Detective®: Singapore and Cultural Detective®: Malaysia.