

## Dietz, Graham

### Trust-building across cultural boundaries: Theory and practice - Presentation 30 mins -

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#### Abstract

More and more of us are required in our work to build effective trusting relationships with people from different 'cultures'. By this I mean not just across national cultural boundaries, but also between different organisations (as with a merger or joint venture), professions (as with a cross-functional work team), and even different intra-organisational sub-cultures. Yet the potential for encountering alternative value systems, and exposure to other parties' unfamiliar thought processes and/or behavioural patterns, can mean that trust-building is very difficult to achieve. This presentation will present theoretical and practical ideas on overcoming cultural boundaries.

It draws upon Chao and Moon's idea that each of us has an identity that can be best thought of as a 'cultural mosaic'. We each hold values and adhere to norms that stem from the *multiple* cultural groupings to which we belong: not just national, but also professional, organisational and 'associative'. It then builds on work emerging from a forthcoming edited collection in arguing that our culture(s)/ cultural mosaic determines, in part, how we think and what we do, including what we consider trustworthy conduct from ourselves and from others. Accordingly, in every cross-cultural encounter we give off 'cues' about our own trustworthiness, and about the prospects of a trusting relationship forming between us and another party. These cues are derived, in part, by the influential 'tiles' in our own 'cultural mosaic', but they are interpreted through the *filters* provided by the 'tiles' in our counterpart's mosaic. Hence, the degree of trust in a relationship pivots around the signals interpreted from these cues.

The first challenge in cross-cultural encounters is, therefore, to understand how these 'cues' are generated by the parties, and the cultural values behind them. The second challenge is to understand how the cues are interpreted, and whether they produce a 'consensually determined meaning' that leads to trust – or not.

In essence, the paper argues that trust may emerge from: 1) recognition and promotion of shared cultural identities; 2) an alignment of tiles and identities; 3) one party's acceptance of, and possibly adaptation toward, the other's dominant culture; or 4) from the 'self-organizing' creation of a new, *shared* cultural identity created by the parties for themselves (as with a merger). But if the other party's tiles are mystifying, even alienating, we may interpret them as indicative of their lack of trustworthiness, and trust may, accordingly, falter.

The paper illustrates the theory with both fictitious scenarios and real-life cases.

#### Learning outcomes for participants

- The theoretical basis behind the idea that individuals have and operate within their own 'cultural mosaic'.
- How the theory of trust-building and the idea of the cultural mosaic can be combined to help people interact effectively with people from potentially contrasting cultures.
- Examining the practical implications of the process.

#### Profile

Dr Graham Dietz is a Lecturer in Human Resource Management at Durham Business School, Durham University, where he is also the MA Programme Director. He received his PhD in industrial relations from the London School of Economics in 2002. He has published articles on trust and trust repair in leading international journals, including the *Academy of Management Review* and *International Journal of Human Resource Management*. He is a co-editor of a forthcoming book on trust across cultures (Cambridge University Press). Graham is English by birth (but also half-Irish from his mother), an academic by profession, an HR/OB specialist by training, a Durham University employee by current paid position, and an Arsenal fan by choice.