Chapter 11

The Impact of Culture Bump and Technology on Creating Effective Diversity Leadership

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ABSTRACT

One practical application of technology to promote diversity leadership can be found in the Culture Bump Approach to cross-cultural communication. This approach to dealing with differences offers the opportunity for leaders to understand the process of connecting beyond differences in a sustainable way. When this is combined with the advantages of delivering training via technology, a new possibility for diversity emerges. In this chapter, the authors examine the culture bump approach to dealing with differences, the impact of diversity leadership being framed within the culture bump approach, and technology’s contribution to both.

More than a century of electronic technology, we have extended our central nervous system itself in a global embrace, abolishing both space and time as far as our planet is concerned (Marshall McLuhan, 1994).

CULTURE BUMP APPROACH

The Culture Bump Approach emerges from the concept of a culture bump. Archer (1991) defines a culture bump as a cultural difference. Specifically, it is the phenomenon that occurs when an individual has expectations of a particular behavior within a particular situation and encounters a different
behavior when interacting with an individual from another culture. Expectations as used in the above definition, refer to the expectations of “normal behavior” as learned in one’s own culture (p. 45). Far more than a definition, culture bump includes a theory revolving around the phenomenon and a methodology emanating from the theory. The Culture Bump Approach to dealing with differences (cultural, gender, ethnic, etc.) evolved from this concept and its theoretical underpinnings. The Approach includes culture specific and culture general content and incorporates experiential activities as well as cognitive activities. It includes units on (1) cultural perceptions, (2) cultural communication styles, (3) cultural values, (4) cross-cultural adaptation, (5) emotional intelligence, (6) human commonalities, and (7) culture bumps.

UNIQUE ASPECTS OF CULTURE BUMP APPROACH

While the first four items listed above might be found in any traditional intercultural training program, the last three are unique. The unit on culture bumps explains the concept and the theory and provides a structured strategy for analyzing one’s culture bumps. The unit on human commonalities provides two levels of universals including examples of cultural relativism and human existentialism. Along with focusing on the behavior (or culture bump), another aspect of the Culture Bump Approach that distinguishes it from other approaches to dealing with differences is the emphasis on managing one’s own emotions about encountering differences. As Kerr, Garvin, Heaton, and Boyle (2006) suggest, the relationship between emotional intelligence and leadership effectiveness is quite strong. When training in emotional intelligence is part and parcel of training for cross-cultural effectiveness as it is in the Culture Bump Approach, the impact on diversity leadership can be very powerful. The Culture Bump Approach provides the means for an organization to move diversity from their periphery, as a separate, ad hoc responsibility, to a central position recognized as an essential component for success, the concept of diversity leadership emerges. The context for understanding these three content areas is found in a basic assumption about the point of origin for understanding differences.

FUNDAMENTAL ASSUMPTION OF CULTURE BUMP APPROACH

A critical distinction of the Culture Bump Approach is its assumption that the point of origin for intercultural understanding is a specific observable difference, which Archer (1991) termed a culture bump. The Culture Bump Approach, therefore, interpersonal and represents a paradigm shift from more traditional approaches to learning about cultural and other differences, which focused on the construct of culture. This traditional approach, which relies on understanding the values, beliefs, and certain behaviors of cultural groups, is insufficient for understanding the complexity of human interactions. Abdallah-Pretceille (2006) calls for a paradigm shift away from the concept of culture saying that “cultural traces” or “cultural fragments” are more consistent with the reality of cross-cultural interactions in today’s global society. The Culture Bump Approach represents this paradigm shift by shifting the point of origin to a specific behavior that any individual may experience. Thus, a specific, personal experience becomes the driving force for developing four specific skills that are essential in effectively communicating with those from another culture.

CULTURE BUMP SKILLS AND STEPS

Archer (2004) describes these as (1) being able to identify and objectively describe one’s own culture bumps, (2) being able to describe exactly what you expect yourself (and others) to do in any situation and then being able to ascribe a meaning