



# Engaging Across Differences

Cross-Cultural Competency &  
Relationship and Team Development

## Engaging Across Differences

© Susan Letterman White 2015. All rights reserved.

[www.LettermanWhite.com](http://www.LettermanWhite.com)

No part of this work may be copied or transferred to any other expression or form without permission from the author.

Permission to copy forms.

*To Whom it May Concern:*

This document shall confirm that Letterman White Consulting is granting you the right to make copies of the forms located on pages 6-10 of these Workshop Materials. Such copies are for your use only. All copies must retain the copyright notice located on the bottom of each page.

If you have any questions regarding the permissions granted in this guide, please contact [SusanLettermanWhite@gmail.com](mailto:SusanLettermanWhite@gmail.com).

## ENGAGING ACROSS DIFFERENCES

### Relationship & Team Development, Inclusion, and Cross-Cultural Competency

Engaging across differences is a structured process for transforming group culture and power dynamics from dominant group influenced to shared value and common goal influenced through interpersonal and group dialogue. Its purpose is to build genuine connections between people. The process incorporates key elements of both strategic communication and strategy implementation. In particular it rests on the dual intentions to: (1) engage others through curiosity and (2) deepen self awareness of one's impact on others through reflection.

Interpersonal dialogue takes place in pairs or small groups with an aim toward getting to know others and allowing others to know you on a deeper and less superficial level. The process requires individuals to engage in two behaviors:

1. Exercise curiosity with open-ended questions about others:
  - a. What are the elements of a person's background and resulting differences in perspectives, behaviors, and value added to a team?
  - b. What are the shared values and goals relevant to your organization's mission and leader's vision?
2. Shared reflection on the outcomes of the interpersonal or group interactions:
  - a. What? What was the outcome of the interaction?
    - Changes in thinking? What new knowledge do we have about each other?
    - Changes in feelings? What new feelings do we have about each other?
    - Changes in behavior? How are we acting differently toward each other?
  - b. So what? What does it mean in the context of our shared purpose to build genuine connections with each other?
  - c. Now what?
    - Strategically speaking, what are the next steps to further our shared purpose?
    - Strategically speaking, how can we leverage our differences to collaboratively further our organizational mission and vision?

Team development, inclusion, and cross-cultural competency go hand-in-hand. All teams are groups; however, not all groups are teams and not all teams work well together. A team works well together to achieve its shared purpose when the group exhibits strong inclusion behaviors. Developing group inclusion depends on the cross-cultural competencies of the group members, in particular their awareness of differences and how to leverage differences for high performance.

The individuals, on a team that performs well, often have complementary skills, are committed to a common approach to the team's purpose, and hold themselves mutually accountable. (Katzenbach & Smith) Team

performance also may be affected by the context - whether the situation in which the team must perform has adequate resources and other conditions, such as competencies and trust. (Dyer, Dyer & Dyer) Consider the different skills needed to construct a building. Consider what happens when team members lack adequate communication skills and each member assumes the team's purpose or specific task means something different. What happens if there is a lack of trust?

Trust flows from a sense of inclusion, which is built with solid communication skills and other behavioral and cross-cultural competencies. Trust and accountability are markers of high performing teams.

### **Group and Team Development Explained**

Since teams are groups, even teams that eventually perform at very high levels go through a developmental process. There are several models that help explain normal group behavior as it develops over time and dysfunctional behavior that may surface. The Tuckman Model (1965) has four developmental stages, beginning when the group first forms and beginning again when group members leave or new people join. Think of the group as a singular "it" rather than each individual separately. The stages are:

- **Forming:** People are very polite and agreeable. In the language of the MBTI© assessment, the extraverts speak up and the introverts are quieter. This preparation stage allows people to develop comfort and trust with one another and start thinking of themselves as part of a group and not simply individuals sharing space.
- **Storming:** The comfort level rises and group members start expressing their interests and concerns, leading to conflict and argument.
- **Norming:** The group's collective focus switches from itself to its task and how it will perform as a group. Norms or rules of behavior in the group are created as explicit rules or implicit in the culture of acceptable behavior.
- **Performing:** The group shifts focus from process awareness and development to performing its tasks.

Most groups, even those with ideal dynamics, will progress through developmental stages, although these stages are not necessarily linear and groups are prone to repeat steps during the course of their existence. Drexler, Sibbet & Forrester (2009) proposed a 7-step model as follows:

1. **Orientation:** Individuals are wondering why they are part of the team and why the team exists.
2. **Trust Building:** Individuals learn about each other.
3. **Goal Clarification:** Individuals focus on what they will have to do and how they will know that they have completed their purpose.
4. **Commitment:** Individuals focus on creating action plans for attaining goals and consider whether they are "in" or "out."
5. **Implementation:** Individuals experience who will do what, when, and how.
6. **High Performance:** The team is completing its tasks.

7. Renewal: Team members wonder if the purpose of the team is completed or if there is a need to continue working together.

### **Developing Groups into High Performing, Inclusive, and Culturally Competent Teams**

There are many processes for transforming a new group into a high-performing team. They all begin with steps to develop trust and inclusion - an individual's sense of belonging and being valued by others in the group. Our process combines *The 8 Principles of Cross-Cultural Competency*, the *Cross-Cultural Competency and Team Development Model*, and *Developing Differences* template for a trust and inclusion-building conversation that begins transforming groups into teams.

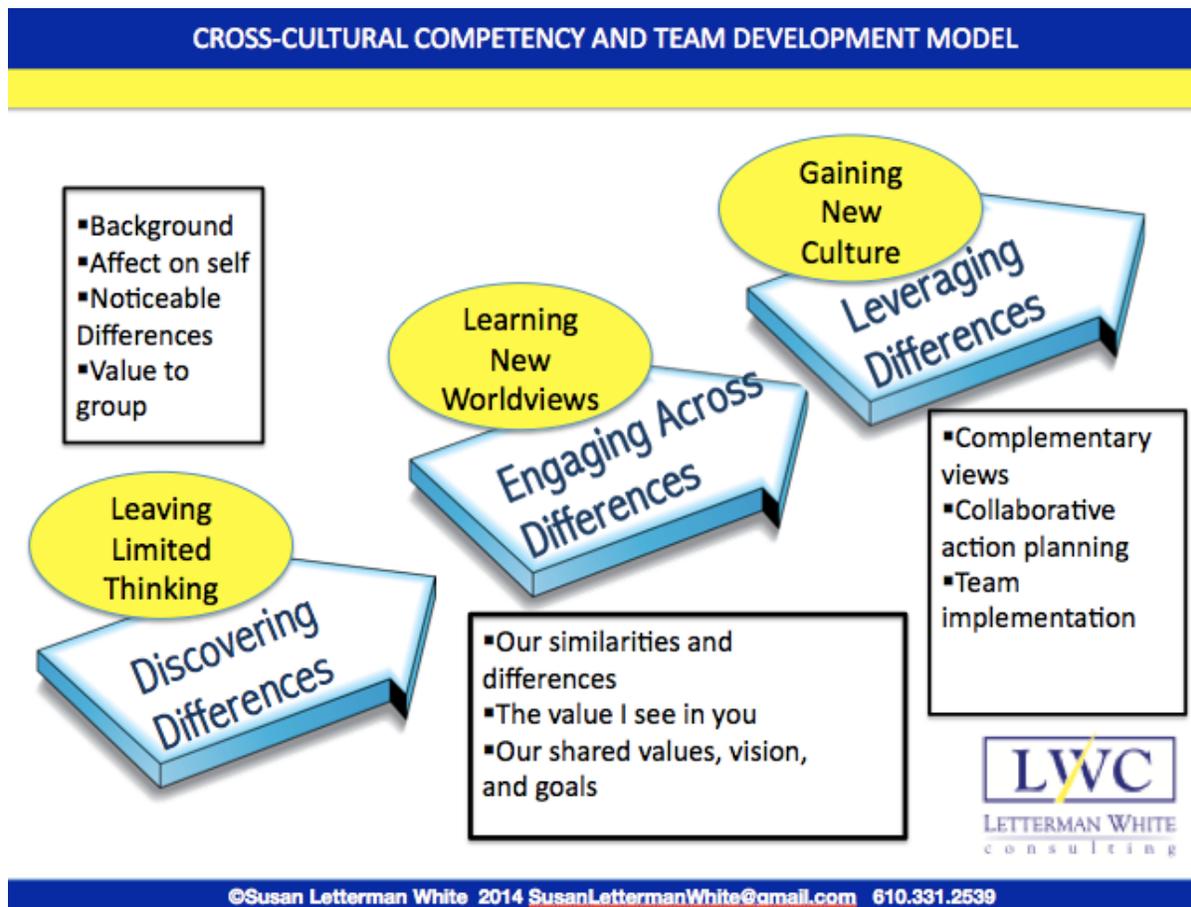
### **8 Principles of Cross-Cultural Competency**

Rely on these 8 principles to create inclusion and trust in pairs or a group and build the foundation for a strong team.

1. Multi-cultural differences, based on a wide range of characteristics from multiple contexts that inform an individual's identity, are present in every group.
2. Self-awareness of one's own culture, differences, and characteristics precedes engaging others across differences and forming effective working relationships.
3. Engaging across differences is the combination of two skills: strategic communication and learning. Strategic communication is the ability to communicate in ways that make the impact of your behavior match your intention. Learning is the ability to be curious, manage-not-avoid risks, make mistakes, respond quickly, self-reflect, and self-correct.
4. A dominant culture exists in almost every group. People in the dominant culture are as unaware of the culture as people are of the air they breathe. People in the dominant culture assume that their way of thinking, feeling, and acting is the same for everyone.
5. Noticing, naming, and discussing conflicting and intersecting cultural norms and identities will improve group dynamics and performance.
6. The initial or founding conditions of a society, organization, or group profoundly affect group dynamics and performance.
7. Multi-cultural group differences exist between professional and support staff, different stakeholders with different interests and concerns, different groups brought together by a merger, or between any individuals or groups where there is a perceived power differential.
8. Cross-cultural competency begins with acknowledging each person "in the room" and the value the person brings to the group.

### Cross-Cultural Competency and Team Development Model

Three stages comprise our cross-cultural competency and team development model: (1) Discovering Differences; (2) Engaging Across Differences; and (3) Leveraging Differences.



This model is a tool to help groups move through the earlier stages of group and team development more easily and at a faster pace.

- Stage One: Discovering Differences. This is the opportunity for individuals in a pair or team members to discover who is the other or who in the group, orient themselves to the group and each other, and begin to develop comfort.

The term “differences” refers to the elements of one’s background related to race, gender, ethnicity, sexual identity, birth socioeconomic status or class, age, religious traditions, physical ability, geographic origin,

family origin, birth order, education, age/generation, life experiences, and more. Our background of experiences over a lifetime affect our thinking, feelings, and actions. These are hidden or visible cross-cultural differences that inform a person's worldview, assumptions, beliefs, values, feelings, attitudes, and behaviors that manifest as a result. When these differences are shared by enough group members, they may lead to group hidden assumptions, beliefs, values, feelings, attitudes and behavioral norms that inadvertently oppress or marginalize other group members. These differences also bring different value to the group.

**DISCOVERING DIFFERENCES TEMPLATE SAMPLE**

<b>Element of My Background</b>	<b>Hidden Differences</b>	<b>Visible Differences</b>	<b>Value I Bring to Group</b>
Mother of grown children	Thinking that others' interests and concerns; managing multiple tasks, is something that everyone can do; limitless power of human potential	Slow to self-promote; slow to say "no" when asked to do something	Looking out for others' interests and concerns; encouraging of others
Skier, figure skater, rock climber	Value competition; tolerate discomfort; tenacious; quitting isn't an option	Slow to suggest changes to uncomfortable physical environment	Familiarity with coaching relationship and behaviors
Massachusetts	Assumptions about travel/ journey - other travelers will be unpredictable, signage will be unclear or absent	Combination of defensive and aggressive, willing to try to figure out current situation in the face of less than full information	Ability to respond strategically to the unexpected or move forward without clear instructions

DISCOVERING DIFFERENCES TEMPLATE

Element of My Background	Hidden Differences	Visible Differences	Value I Bring to Group

Fill out a template for yourself or at least think about your differences and how they affect your behavior and increase your value to a group.

- Stage Two: Engaging Across Differences. This step is a dialogue with an aim toward getting to know others and allowing others to know you on a deeper and less superficial level. The process requires individuals to listen and be curious. The aim is to uncover hidden team value in differences and commonalities for building trust.

**After everyone has jotted down a few notes on the template above, allow everyone a chance to share their reason for choosing this team, a background element, its hidden and visible differences, and the value the person brings to the team as a result.**

- Stage Three: Leveraging Differences. This step shifts the focus from the group's identity to the team's purpose and tasks.

## TEAM OR PAIR PROJECT:

**Team Leader:**

Team Member Name	Phone	Email

**About**

Susan Letterman White, J.D., M.S. (Organization Development)

Boston, MA

---

**Susan Letterman White** helps leaders design, implement, and manage customized, organization-wide, strategic change projects to create sustainable and substantial performance improvements. Her work aligns leadership, culture, and competency modeling with performance goal outcomes of: (1) business development, retention, and growth and (2) the engagement, development, advancement, and retention of exceptional people.

Susan was an employment law litigator and trusted advisor to her clients for more than 20 years and a managing partner of a law firm before she began her Master of Science studies in Organization Development. In 2008, She was awarded her M.S. degree with Academic Distinction from American University. She is certified to administer competency, culture, and personality assessment tools, interpret results, coach and consult using:

- Korn/Ferry Leadership Architect®
- Korn/Ferry Voices®
- Myers Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI®)
- Thomas Kilmann Inventory (TKI)
- Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI)
- Organization Network Mapping

She also has received advanced training in group dynamics and facilitation from NTL Institute and is certified as a mediator.

Susan is a frequent speaker at national and local conferences (ABA 2012-2014, LMA 2013, ALA -Boston Chapter 2014, MBA 2013-2014, NAWL 2011, WLALA 2011 and 2012) and in law schools (University of Maryland Law School, Northeastern University School of Law, University of Tulsa Law School, and St. Thomas University School of Law). She is also a past chair of the ABA Women Rainmakers (2011-2013), a member of ABA Law Practice Division Counsel (2012- present), a member of the Massachusetts Bar Law Practice Management Committee (2013 - present), and a member of the Boston Bar Association Diversity and Inclusion Committee (2013- present). She has delivered trainings and workshops on culture change, leadership, team building, diversity and inclusion, organization dynamics and networks, relationship building, strategic communication, and client engagement for law firms, non-profit organizations, and Fortune 500 companies.

Susan is the author of *Power and Influence for Lawyers: How to Use it to Develop Business and Advance your Career* (Thomson-Reuters/West Publishing 2011) and many articles for national and local publications. She is working on her second book, which is on the topic of strategic organizational change, is an adjunct faculty member at Northeastern University, serves as an arbitrator and mediator for workplace disputes, and can be reached at [SusanLettermanWhite@gmail.com](mailto:SusanLettermanWhite@gmail.com) or 610-331-2539.



### **About Letterman White Consulting**

We provide customized change-management and organization-development strategy design and implementation to improve performance through culture, leadership, and the competencies needed to advance your individual, group, or organizational strategic vision and goals.

---

### **Providing the Business Strategy Solution That's Right for You**

We develop cultures of:

- Adaptability and agility
- Client centeredness
- Continuous learning and improvement
- Inclusion

Our leadership development is aimed at:

- Client development, retention, and cross-selling
- Change management
- Post merger and acquisitions integration
- Succession planning for leadership and clients
- Talent engagement, development, advancement, and retention of exceptional lawyers

We evaluate organizational, group, and individual performance and competencies using assessment tools including:

- Korn/Ferry Leadership Architect®
- Korn/Ferry Voices® 360 Assessment
- Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI)
- Myers Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI®)
- Organization Network Mapping
- Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Model Instrument (TKI)

Competencies we assess for include:

- Client focus
- Strategic mindset
- Ability to manage others
- Relationship building
- Conflict management
- Communication
- Organizational cultural alignment
- Learning, risk, and resilience orientation

We develop individuals, teams, and organizations through:

- Coaching (individual and group)
- Formal training programs
- Process and structure design and alignment
- Group facilitation
- Retreats

### **Copyright**

© Susan Letterman White 2015. All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy recording, or any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from Susan Letterman White.