

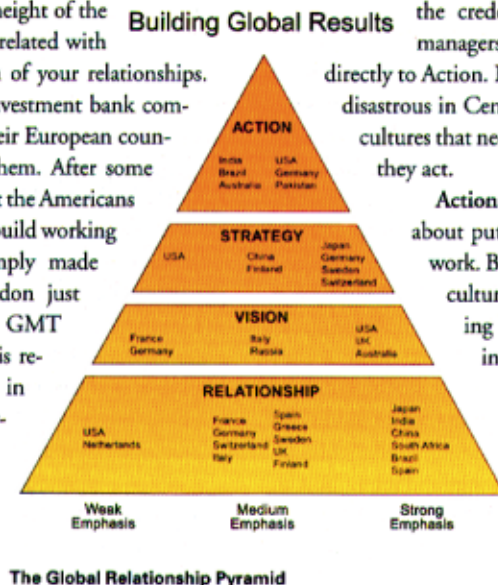
Getting results across borders

Some cross-cultural blind spots are downright funny. Sweden's Electrolux was surprised when its vacuum cleaner was not selling in the United States. Why? Well, the company had marketed the vacuum with the slogan "Nothing sucks like Electrolux".

Other intercultural mistakes are less funny and more expensive. Microsoft wanted to launch Windows in China, but used Taiwanese programmers who peppered the application with references to "communist bandits". A tiny mistake became a strategic disaster: furious, the Chinese government decided to back Linux instead – in the third-largest software market worldwide.

How can you prevent such costly culture clashes? In twenty years of coaching managers on five continents, I've learned that any accomplishment – from a simple meeting to a complex endeavor like seeking dominance in a chosen market – requires that you move through the Global Results Pyramid, a four-level method for producing results across borders. Clashes happen when cultures stress different levels.

Relationship. Eager to get right down to business, Westerners often neglect Relationship. But the height of the Pyramid is directly correlated with the breadth and depth of your relationships. Executives at a U.S. investment bank complained bitterly that their European counterparts had ignored them. After some prodding we found that the Americans had never bothered to build working relationships; they simply made demands, calling London just before end of business GMT and saying, "I need this report today." Similarly, in Japan and India, it is virtually impossible to do business without building trust, which can take months.



Vision. Vision is a view of the future; ultimately it is the answer to the question, "What do we want?" Americans and Germans are typically strong in Vision, but Vision must be shared or it can backfire. Although touting DaimlerChrysler as a "merger of equals," chairman Jürgen Schrempp failed to create a shared vision of the combined firm. On the contrary: he pushed all but two Americans off the joint management board. DaimlerChrysler paid dearly for imposing its narrow vision: its revenue fell by 13% and its operating profit by 75% that year. Five years later, recovery is still not certain.

Strategy. Strategy is all about "How": "How will we do this? What will it cost?" At the Vision level, optimism was called for; Strategy demands a reality check. Some cultures emphasize Strategy less than others. In the U.S., the credo "Just Do It" forces managers to jump from Vision directly to Action. But that impulse can be disastrous in Central Europe or Japan – cultures that need detailed plans before they act.

Action. The final level is all about putting the other three to work. But remember that other cultures have reasons for doing what they do. Bargaining in will meet with resistance unless you create a demand for your actions. Be sure to give people freedom to decline or counter-offer your



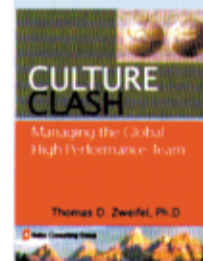
Thomas D. Zweifel

requests, and be patient.

Train yourself to see what level of the Global Results Pyramid is missing. If people are upset, it's Relationship. If they are defeatist or overly risk-averse, it's Vision. If they are confused or paralyzed, it might be Strategy. A lack of action is a symptom of something wrong at one of the other levels. Manage the four levels of the Global Results Pyramid, and you will get the results you want.

Thomas D. Zweifel, Ph.D., is CEO of Swiss Consulting Group, a New York City-based global coaching company. He teaches leadership and intercultural competency at Columbia University and Fortune 500 companies. He is the author of *Culture Clash* (SelectBooks 2003) and *Communicate or Die* (SelectBooks 2003).

> Book Giveaway



forum has ten copies of *Culture Clash* to give away. For your chance to win, send an email entitled **BOOK GIVEAWAY** to martina-a.merten@db.com by November 1, 2003. The winners will be drawn at random and informed via email.