

# East Meets West

*Sooner rather than later, East will meet West in your workplace. Then you will be glad there are people like Clifford Clarke around to help bring intercultural behavior into the nineties.*

**E**ast literally meets West in Clifford Clarke, and intercultural awareness is in his genes. Born to American missionary parents, he grew up in Japan but went to college in the United States. With his made-in-Japan values and communication style, he was essentially a foreign student in his own country. After college he returned to Japan to work in a hotel—the only foreigner among 1,100 staff members.

“It was probably the happiest year of my life. They took me in as if I were family. I learned Japanese management and to be Japanese in the workplace.

“My cultural roots for valuing other cultures come from my great, great grandfather, who was a missionary in Ogbomoshos, Nigeria. He wrote a book about the Yoruba tribes in Africa and took the position of valuing their culture. The book was iced by the Southern Baptist Convention for 120 years, but ultimately was published in Nigeria.”

Joy Salmons’s Ph.D. dissertation at Florida State University maintains that missionaries’ children mature slowly on account of the mixed cultures in their backgrounds. She says, “we finally force ourselves at about age 35 to become who we are, but I think we keep a healthy schizophrenia about our biculturality.”

Today, Clarke heads a company that



helps *Fortune* 100 companies develop some healthy bicultural schizophrenia of their own. His business, the Clarke Consulting Group, based in California, Georgia, and Japan, uses on-line process consulting to identify cultural issues based on misunderstanding in the workplace.

**TDJ:** It sounds as if your work is to audit a company’s intercultural awareness. What kinds of things do you audit?

**Clarke:** We audit intercultural productivity, not awareness. That’s a very important distinction between cognitive and behavioral information.

We have developed a model of on-line process consulting and on-line training that intervenes in the daily business process to identify and to resolve cultural issues based on misunderstanding. From that real-time data we develop different kinds of

training interventions and approaches that focus on behavior.

Our work is built on a process of

**“Synergy is a process. It’s like the California sushi roll”**

## **An Interview With Clifford Clarke**

observing, interviewing, and identifying patterns of behavior. Instead of presenting only cognitive information about a target culture, it provides skill training to help people to be effective and interact and work in another culture.

Pure cognitive training about another culture can show what to do and skill training can show how to do it, but in reality, interaction between

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people from different cultures is based only in part on what you know how to do. The other part is based on the ways you change when you are interacting across cultures.

Here's what can happen. You train all the Americans in Japanese behavior and all the Japanese in American behavior, and you end up with the classic case of the Japanese extending his or her hand to shake while the American is bowing from the hip and hitting the Japanese on the head.

Intercultural training must take into consideration the interactive element. It's not enough to assume that if we learn to do it their way we will be effective.

Ironically, the Japanese have already learned how to do it the American way and they're not too interested in Americans learning to do it the Japanese way. That's an issue of courtesy on the one hand and power on the other. Americans will interpret it as power, while the Japanese will intend courtesy.

**TDJ:** Can you give an example of how on-line process consulting works?

**Clarke:** Let's say a Japanese sees his colleague get her thumb caught in a conveyor belt. Seeking the help of his American team manager to stop the machine, he runs to where the manager is talking with another American about Saturday's football game. There's a lot of noise in the plant so the two Americans are shouting to be heard above the din.

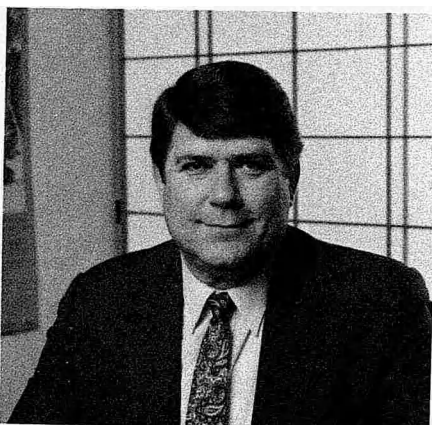
The Japanese is of course terribly anxious that his co-worker will lose her thumb in the conveyor belt, but politely and respectfully, he doesn't shout at the two Americans to interrupt them. He tries to interrupt them nonverbally with eye contact, by bowing, by standing nearby, and eventually by clearing his throat, but nothing works. The Americans go right on with their shouted conversation about football and the Japanese loses her thumb.

Remember, we're anthropologists, and anthropologists have to be in the community and in the culture. We wouldn't leave the workplace and begin gathering all the studies about discourse analysis. Our approach is to observe how interruption takes place in this company's culture.

If this were a real situation, we

would interview the Americans to find out how they could have been interrupted and what interruption skills would have worked with them. Their answers would become the data base for behavioral training in interrupting skills for the Japanese working on the conveyor belt. The goal would be to teach the Japanese to interrupt in a fashion that is acceptable within the business culture in which they are working.

**TDJ:** What are some other behaviors that companies might need help with from an intercultural perspective?



**Clarke:** One whole set of behaviors involves the performance appraisal process. Appraisals have a strong American bias: a data base that is measured objectively, recorded quantitatively, and kept permanently in your record; goals or behavioral standards against which to be measured in an annual review.

The American pay-for-performance system comes out of the civil rights law and out of efforts to be fair and treat people equally, but it is a slap in the face for many Japanese, whose performance appraisal methods and standards are much more subjective. Their appraisals happen more often and are more private; they are seldom recorded. They are also more qualitative, in the sense that they serve to motivate and model desirable behavior as well as to appraise.

**TDJ:** What happens when you use an American-style performance appraisal system with Japanese workers?

**Clarke:** A conflict occurs between pay for performance and the Japanese system that allows you to progress on the pay ladder by virtue of your age and

rank. Some Japanese companies are beginning to change their systems toward a quantified approach, but with very small variations around a mean.

Another problem occurs because American companies will pay a great deal more money to a good performer than to a poor performer. The Japanese have learned that Americans motivate with money and titles, and so when Japanese are managing in the United States they use money and titles to motivate the Americans.

Japanese are accustomed to being motivated by information, by affiliation, and by many other means besides money. The one exception would be if a work group wanted more money. But an individual Japanese wouldn't say to the boss, "I'm so much more valuable than anyone else around me that I want a raise." And yet we value Americans who will do that.

There are about 120 such cultural differences that we've identified between Japanese and American standards and norms in the workplace.

**TDJ:** Do you find any differences between Americans who work with Japanese in Japan, and Americans who work with Japanese in the United States? Are the cultural issues the same or different?

**Clarke:** The major cultural issues are the same: feedback, evaluation methodology, the lines between authority and responsibility, and information management.

Americans believe there is a distinction between authority and responsibility. Japanese believe authority rests in the group process toward consensus, for which everyone is responsible. Leadership moves the group toward consensus and expresses the decision for the group in a timely manner. Japanese leadership stands in, whereas American leadership stands out.

The differences are based on communication styles and values. It doesn't really matter whether the American is a boss or a subordinate, you'll still have the same problems.

**TDJ:** You've worked in this field for more than 20 years. Are there any problems that come up after you've been immersed in Japanese culture for a long time and think you understand it? What are the deepest issues?



**Clarke:** The things that run deepest I refer to as the BMW model. That's the *ba*, the *ma*, and the *wa*. They are the things that run so deep that they continue to be a problem, even to people like myself who are American but grew up in Japan.

The *ba* is the issue of status versus equality. Japanese have a sense of equality in the humanity of people. For example, the president of a Japanese company will talk every day to the shoeshine man near his office about his family and his business. It will be a human exchange of real quality at the feeling level, much more than you might see between the president of an American company and its janitor.

But status in the workplace is much tougher to break into in Japan than in the United States. Americans value the equality of people, opportunity, and rewards in the workplace, and that is very different from the Japanese age-rank system.

In Japan the rules of status are unbending. Koreans are on the bottom. Women are on the bottom. You can make real human contact, but in terms of opportunity, there is eternal oppression. A foreigner in a Japanese company in Japan experiences that daily. For most there's an exclusion from the decision making process that ultimately results in resentment and often hostility.

The second issue is *ma*. It has to do with space, particularly with regard to timing in conversations and timing in feedback. Americans are really pushed by efficiency, but the Japanese are pushed by effectiveness. It can take much longer to do things in Japan, and Americans there run out of patience even when they understand completely the concept of *ma*.

The third issue is *wa*. That's harmony and it's the most important of the three. The concept of harmony drives a communication style that is bifurcated into *tatema* and *bonne*. *Tatema* is public communication, for the principle of things. It means to stand in front of. It's form-conscious behavior and it is essential for social maintenance of harmony. It dominates communication.

*Honne* is the opposite. It's the true essence of one's feelings and in English it is translated as honesty.

The issue of integrity is judged differently across cultures. To Americans,

either you are honest or you are not. Japanese judge that a person has integrity for the maintenance of harmony; if you don't maintain harmony, you're lacking in integrity. You're self-centered. You're a bad influence on society.

Being honest about your feelings is an American necessity and the measure of integrity, whereas in Japan behaving harmoniously and adjusting to another's feelings is a measure of one's integrity.

## Working for the Japanese

"Already in 1990, there are approximately 640 plants in this country owned or partially owned by Japanese, employing some 160,000 workers. More than one hundred new Japanese-American plants are expected to begin operation by 1991. This, of course, does not include the Japanese retailing and service firms that have opened American operations in recent years. [It is] estimated that 840,000 Americans will be working for Japanese companies by the end of the decade."

(From *Working for the Japanese: Inside Mazda's American Auto Plant*, by Joseph J. Fucini and Suzy Fucini. Published by The Free Press, New York.)

Americans believe in dualism, in right and wrong. Japanese call it *erabi bunka*, the selection culture. Their own is called *awase bunka*, the adjustment culture, and it's the one grounded in harmony.

So you have two different standards for measuring integrity. I have found very few Americans who can accept that value difference in the workplace. A lot of Americans want us to train them in how to get *bonne* or honesty out of the Japanese. The Japanese would see this as training in how to be disrespectful or how to violate harmony. But Americans need it because they believe you can only make valid decisions if you violate harmony.

The ideal communication for a Japanese is when you don't have to say the point, when you have the ability to read each other without using words. The other person creates an at-

mosphere from which to glean what is meant through innuendos and nuances, and you are safe because you don't have to state a position. And if you don't have to state a position, there won't be confrontation. And when there is no confrontation, there is harmony. You adjust and massage and work toward what you can both accept in the middle. Good and bad, right and wrong, are all part of the whole, just like the Chinese model of yin and yang.

The American approach is dialectic. It's direct, it's verbal, it's analytical, and it's confrontational. Western science has taught us to separate all things out and find the truth. American Aristotelian logic tells us to separate the good from the bad. Consequently, Americans can't deal well with differences because of the cultural assumption that differences are bad and the psychological assumption that dissonance must be resolved.

Anthropological theory suggests that every culture fights against change and fights to protect its own integrity and existence. Part of the way we do that is to deny differences. That's why integrating differences in a cultural change process is always very painful.

Some people in the multicultural field support a psychological theory of healthy schizophrenia in which you maintain dissonance instead of resolving it. How do you integrate the conflicting values of harmony and honesty? How do you include both of these in your being? How can you be both Japanese and American in your behavior in the workplace?

If you're going to work in the multicultural field, you have to come into it with an assumption about the value and the beauty of differences. If we can't value cultural diversity, then overseas we're not global; we're international. We're dominating.

**TDJ:** Given the differences you've described and the difficulty of reconciling Eastern and Western views about them, what are your views about the future?

**Clarke:** Organizations and individuals go through cycles in dealing with cultural diversity in the workplace and in their lives. Those cycles have been studied for about 40 years and are predictable now; based on them. I

would say that we are going to have harder times before things get better. Based on my observations of so many Japanese and American companies, I believe that the Japanese cycle is behind the American cycle. Perhaps the Americans have been working in Japan longer than the Japanese in the United States.

The first stage in these cycles is the honeymoon. It's the stage of the one best system, the one best way regardless of culture. In this cycle I don't feel the need to translate the way I do things because there is only one way. I become the ugly American or the ugly Japanese in Asia.

In the second stage there is a shocking confrontation with all of the differences between two cultures. Japanese companies in the United States handle the second stage through a process of Americanization. They reason that to be effective in the U.S. they have to learn how to change. But if there is no one in their companies to educate them on Americanization, they end up simply putting Americans at the top of the companies and making everyone speak English. Period.

When the American way doesn't work, Japanese companies move to stage three—the Japanese way. They impose all of the standards and disciplines that are reflections of Japanese culture. They tear down all the partitions between desks so that everyone can hear what other people are doing and there are no secrets in the company. They break apart job descriptions so that everyone is taking responsibility for everything. They tell the American employees they can't take Christmas off because they must keep working until all the targets are met. What is Christmas to a Japanese, anyway?

The fourth stage is to reach a compromise in which individual departments are run different ways. The Japanese decide to run the money and the technology their way and run sales and marketing, manufacturing, and personnel the American way.

This is the avant-garde model and the stage to which most American companies have come in Japan, with the exception of marketing. Most still feel they have a lot to teach the Japanese about marketing. Japanese companies in the U.S., however, are just moving from stage two to three. They're just starting to Japanese.

There is a fifth stage, which I call the collaboration model. In this stage there is an acceptance of differences and a desire to communicate. There is a desire to design an organization that values both cultures.

Given the diametrically opposed value systems I mentioned earlier, you can imagine how difficult it is to do. It takes years. It takes commitment. It takes serious, open sharing and communication and learning from each other. It takes dealing with failure sometimes. It takes admitting there is no alternative. Stage five doesn't exist yet. No American company and no Japanese company is there yet, to my knowledge.

### It's One World Out There

- U.S. companies create and sell in Japan \$81 billion in goods and services annually.
- In 1989, there were 126 joint ventures between American and Japanese companies in the auto industry.
- Texas Instruments employs more than 5,000 people in Japan.
- U.S. companies employ more than 100,000 Singaporeans.

Hewlett-Packard has developed a model for stage two. It is Japanese in that it has a Japanese president in Japan and no expats in functions other than technical assistance and liaison. HP has a wonderful process for transferring knowledge and skill from American expats to the Japanese. It puts the expat and the Japanese in a box together in a shared job. For a year the American works with the Japanese to the point that the Japanese is doing the American's job, and then the American can leave. But most companies, American or Japanese, would not risk their business in the hands of a foreigner so quickly.

That's the only effective model that I've seen for having a successful company at the second stage. But the danger is that it might leave you without the ability to become a global company. It might leave you with a subsidiary that thinks of itself as a Japanese company.

I've got one client right now who is starting up a new division in an old company with the intention of start-

ing out in stage five. He has a collaborative model in his head and he is hiring and training and building the corporate culture on it.

**TDJ:** What would you recommend to the human resource development person interested in steering his or her company in a global direction?

**Clarke:** I think for personal growth and development it's a good idea to throw oneself into a tough situation in which you can really experience yourself as a cultural being. For strength you need to operate from a perspective that integrates knowledge, feeling, and behavior. You need to feel the holistic impact of a culture on yourself. Then you can be much more effective in your own company.

I would suggest that you enhance your professional capabilities and develop your career globally by requesting and getting an assignment overseas. From that base I think you can really help from the inside, especially if you buy into and practice the professional model that places you in an appropriate role in the company—a role that knows and serves the line.

I also think you can practice the collaborative model internally. HR is a culture and the line is a culture, and they can work together collaboratively. My experience is that in Europe and Japan, HR is much more collaborative and long-term than it is in the United States.

**TDJ:** What about adapting American training for foreign consumption?

**Clarke:** I see a lot of American training companies rushing with their products to Japan, looking for joint ventures and licensing agreements. Very few are looking for help on modifying them for the Japanese culture.

Some companies, such as Motorola, Chemical Bank, and Morgan Guaranty, are working hard to modify corporate training programs for indigenous users in other countries. Motorola has a training design center in Singapore, with eight cultures represented, where it is developing indigenous training materials and modifying corporate materials for use in Asia.

Anything that we think is culture-



free or universal is not. That's why the need to develop global awareness never stops. Every time we think, we think through the filter of our own culture. We could spend a lifetime modifying it.

A good analogy for intercultural training is the process of training managers in androgynous thinking. Expand that to global management. Learning other cultural ways of doing business is like an American male learning to be OK with "feminine" characteristics: learning to express your apologies when you feel sorry—learning to share your failures, and trusting in the help that will come as a result.

**TDJ:** This magazine recently surveyed its readers about their degree of interest in developing a global perspective. We were surprised to find that it isn't a very strong interest for most people. What do you think will move training professionals to deal with such intercultural issues?

**Clarke:** One motivator for a lot of people will be that their companies are already overseas and will be pushing them into it.

Another kind of movement will come from people who take the initiative to become fuller, more integrative professionals in the context of the world in which we live.

One of humanity's problems is believing that change can be a goal either at an individual level or at a corporate level. We know that companies that value transition and can change quickly are the most successful.

Developing cultural synergies is a process of continual change. Synergy is more of a process than a goal.

It's like the California sushi roll. In it you see pink Japanese crab and green American avocado wrapped together with white rice in the black Japanese nori. It's beautiful. It's a gorgeous piece of comparative culture. It's the essence of the feeling you get at the end of a cognitive training program where you've been comparing cultures. You see it clearly. But then you eat it! You experience an incredibly weird new taste and it's delicious. That's synergy. Then you swallow it and it's gone. You can't keep it. It's a process.

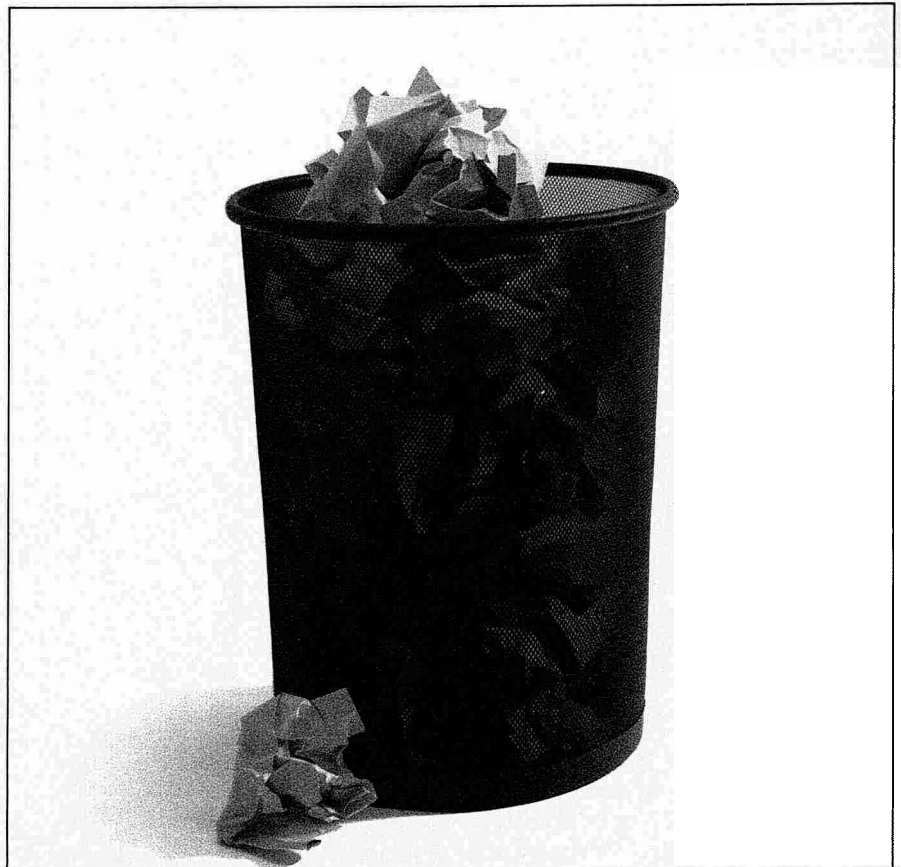
The collaboration model is a process, too. It's training people in a pro-

cess by which they can manage the business in an evolutionary, constantly changing way to most effectively create a workplace where people's changing needs can be met and where they can feel valued and contribute to the goals of the company.

Above all, intercultural collaboration is incredibly stretching and full of potential for growth. It's a challenge but it's absolutely necessary. The survival of the 21st century depends on

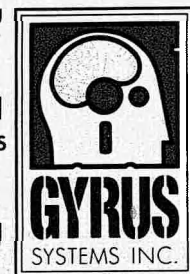
it. It's obviously the direction of the future. It's a critical and important skill for training and development people to be committed to.

It's critical that it be recognized as the essence and not the periphery of successful training and development in the future. The world is shrinking daily; if we ignore the intercultural aspect of our professional careers, we will end up operating in a cave. We will not be real in the 21st century. ■



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