

## When International Teams Collide

International teams are a fact of life for many of us. They cannot be avoided. But often we can feel the frustration of collaborating with people who have different world-views from ourselves and diverse ways of communicating, dealing with time and building trust.

### The challenge

I recently spoke to the HR Director of a large global engineering corporation where much project work is done in global, dispersed, virtual teams. He said that when young talented engineers are promoted to lead international projects, they typically say "never again!" at the end of the project. They rose to a leadership role because of their technical skills – but the challenge of managing diversity virtually, in different time zones, was just too much. They were generally logical, task oriented individuals who came to realise that technical expertise and task-orientation were not the key to making multicultural teams a success. Something else was required – human beings are not as rational or as malleable as a spread-sheet or project plan. As the German philosopher Immanuel Kant said, "Out of the crooked timber of humanity, no straight thing was ever made."

### Research

Research by DiStefano and Maznevski into diverse teams has shown that they are often a destructive, unproductive mess. However, when they do gel, their performance is better and more creative than any homogeneous team.

So the question is, what are they doing differently?

- 1) They have a high degree of self-awareness – both individually and as a team. This tends not to come

### When International Teams Collide

Michael Gates discusses the problems that can be faced when international teams collide and ways of overcoming these cultural differences

### Book Review - *Firms of Endearment - How World Class Companies Profit From Passion and Purpose*

John Frost reviews Jag Sheth, Raj Sisodia and David Wolfe's *Firms of Endearment*

### Cross Cultural Executive Coaching

Our recent Case Study on Cross Cultural Coaching for the India Country Manager of a leading global manufacturer of electronic instruments and electromechanical devices

### Our Favourite Videos and Articles

Our most recent favourite videos including a cross cultural communication talk by Pellegrino Riccardi

### Effective Storytelling: How to take people to action

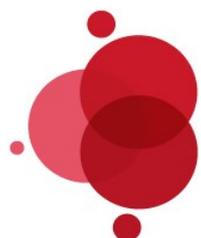
Karen Frost and Jane Sparrow consider how effective storytelling can be used to improve performance of employees and to develop their personal connection to an organisation

### Book Review - *The Virgin Way*

Laura Robertshaw reviews *The Virgin Way*, by Richard Branson

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naturally: it is very hard to see ourselves as others see us. Assessment and measurement can help. This could be through one of the many psychometric tests on the market, through videoing team meetings, or through a cultural assessment. Culture Active ([www.cultureactive.com](http://www.cultureactive.com)) is one such assessment, based on the Lewis Model of Culture, which classifies cultures into three main types; Germanic, Anglo-Saxon and Nordic cultures tend to be more Linear-Active. Latin, African and Middle Eastern cultures more Multi-Active and East Asian cultures more Reactive (See Image 1 for a detailed description of these three categories). Of course individuals from any culture can get assessment scores a long way from what is the statistical average for their culture.

LINEAR-ACTIVE	MULTI-ACTIVE	REACTIVE
Talks half the time	Talks most of the time	Listens most of the time
Does one thing at a time	Does several things at once	Reacts to partner's action
Plans ahead step by step	Plans grand outline only	Looks at general principles
Polite but direct	Emotional	Polite, indirect
Partly conceals feelings	Displays feelings	Conceals feelings
Confronts with logic	Confronts emotionally	Never confronts
Dislikes losing face	Has good excuses	Must not lose face
Rarely interrupts	Often interrupts	Doesn't interrupt
Job-oriented	People-oriented	Very people-oriented
Uses mainly facts	Feelings before facts	Statements are promises
Truth before diplomacy	Flexible truth	Diplomacy over truth
Sometimes impatient	Impatient	Patient
Limited body language	Unlimited body language	Subtle body language
Respects officialdom	Seeks out key person	Uses connections
Separates the social and professional	Interweaves the social and professional	Connects the social and professional

Image 1

Team members (or whole departments or companies) are automatically mapped onto a triangle – as seen in Image 2 – once everyone has completed an assessment, and the results are used to heighten awareness and generate open discussion about how to work together more productively.

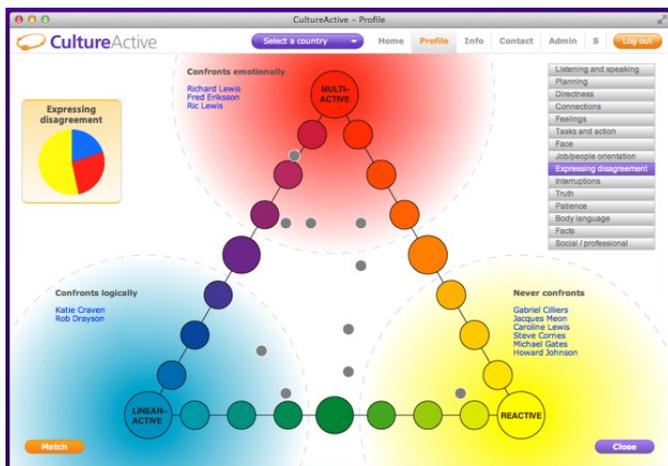


Image 2

2) They are good at closing, or bridging the gaps between diverse team members. A key way to achieve this is through modifying our communication style, and putting ourselves in the shoes of our listeners. I once experienced a great example of this technique on a Lufthansa flight. We experienced very bad turbulence, and the pilot explained the situation in a highly “Germanic” way to the German passengers – full of technical details, context and background, in long sentences with many clauses. This use of grammatically complex, synthetic German language was able to satisfy the German preference for complex explanations. Then, when the pilot switched to his perfect American English, all he said was, “Well ... as you can see, we are on a bit of a rollercoaster, so just sit back, tighten your seatbelts and enjooooooooooy the ride!” For the Americans, the fact that the pilot sounded relaxed and humorous was enough.

**“In teams, members need to be aware of their own and others’ communication styles and at least try and come half way. Many misunderstandings are also caused by a mixture of direct and indirect styles within the team.”**

In teams, members need to be aware of their own and others’ communication styles and at least try and come half way. Many misunderstandings are also caused by a mixture of direct and indirect styles within the team. The British philosopher, John Locke, believed that the vast majority of human misunderstanding was actually verbal.

3) They are good at integrating different approaches. The Economist Intelligence Unit’s 2012 report *Competing Across Borders* claimed that a significant number of companies are stuck at the stage where the benefits of overcoming cultural barriers are recognized but not enough is done to address the challenge. This is true not only



Michael Gates

for companies as a whole, but also at team level. So, it is all very well having diverse skills, but often insufficient attention is paid to actually taking advantage of these skills. Communication plays a part here as well. Probably of all three cultural types, the most under-used, least integrated in international teams is the “Reactive”. Reactives tend

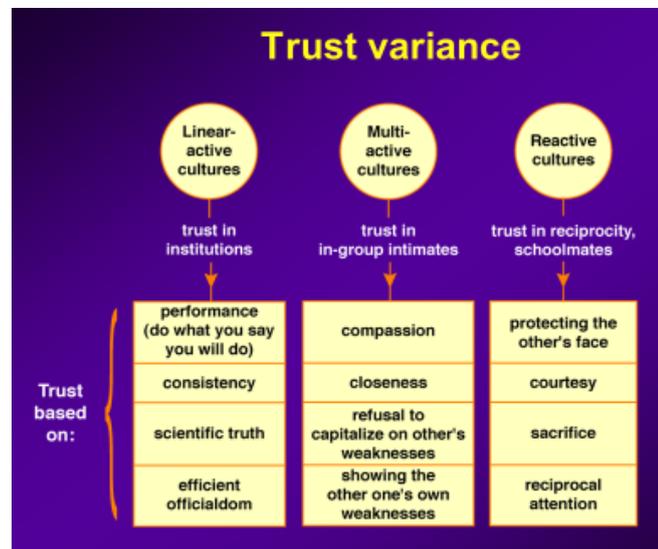
to be deep thinkers who may have the best ideas of all. Yet, because they tend to think before speaking, to be non-interruptive, and not to initiate, their value can be overlooked. One idea to address this issue is for the team to do a Cultural SWOT Analysis together, focusing on the diverse skills they have, then planning how to most effectively use them. This is not a new or complex approach, but it is amazing how easily we forget to do the simple things that could really improve our performance.

### Trust

In the end, trust is the ground-rock for any successful human interaction, yet trust is built in different ways across cultures. Being aware of different trust-building strategies, and applying them within your teams, can do no harm, and will almost certainly lead to better results. If you are a Multi-Active who likes to exaggerate and promise the earth in order to keep enthusiasm high, think for a moment about the effect this may have on a Linear-Active. If you are a logical and direct Linear-Active, consider that you may make your Reactive colleague lose face. If you are Reactive, remember that trying to save the face of your Linear or Multi-Active team members may not be as important to them as understanding your opinions clearly.

### Showing value

HR has a great role to play in developing ways of demonstrating to senior level management the importance of succeeding in cross-cultural collaboration, and of measuring the ROI in doing so. By taking on this responsibility, HR will see benefits for their team and the teams around them, as well as boosting the perceived value of their work.



**If you would like to meet Michael and learn more about the Culture Active Assessment, please visit us at Stand 60 at the HR Directors Summit in Birmingham, 3rd-4th February 2015.**

*By Michael Gates*

*Michael Gates is Vice Chairman of Richard Lewis Communications, one of the world's leading cross-cultural training and consultancy service providers. He is also an Associate Fellow of Saïd Business School, University of Oxford. He is based in Helsinki, Finland.*

## Book Review

### Firms of Endearment - How World Class Companies Profit From Passion and Purpose

By Jag Sheth, Raj Sisodia and David Wolfe

The authors themselves say there is nothing radical and new in their *Firms of Endearment*. And yet, for me, there is. Sheth, Sisodia and Wolfe have identified that we are, in what they call, an "age of transcendence" in which we are looking for a connection with the organisations that we work in and buy from. They explain this idea further on their website; "Today's greatest companies are fuelled by passion and purpose not cash. They earn large profits by enabling all of their stakeholders to thrive: customers, investors, employees, partners, communities and society. These rare, authentic firms of endearment act in powerful positive ways that stakeholders recognise, value and even love."



In the book, the firms of endearment that the authors identify are built on values that have created extraordinary organisations that significantly outperform their competitors. They have also highlighted that it takes courageous leadership to create the atmosphere and climate in which firms of endearment thrive. What I most enjoyed about the book is that it is an inspiring call to action for us as leaders to challenge the paradigm of shareholder value - and the limiting beliefs that often go with it - and strive to create organisations that are truly built on their values, passion and purpose.

Reviewed by John Frost  
 Director of Values Based Leadership  
 Publisher: Pearson FT Press

# Cross Cultural Executive Coaching

## Background

The client we were asked to work with is a leading global manufacturer of electronic instruments and electromechanical devices with annualised sales of \$3.4 billion.

The organisation has 13,300 colleagues working in more than 100 manufacturing facilities with over 100 sales and service centres around the world. VBL works closely with the Director of Human Resources for - EMEA, Brazil, Russia & India. We provide support and offer leadership solutions for the wide ranging needs of their people located across half the globe. One of the leadership solutions VBL provide the organisation is Executive Coaching, especially when senior managers are new in post or are managing an important or challenging aspect of the business.

## The Solution

The Country Manager for India had been successful in growing the business from its base in Bangalore. The HR Director asked Values Based Leadership if they would assign an Executive Coach to the India Country Manager to support them in developing their skills and raise their awareness around working in a global organisation. Specifically, the Country Manager from India needed to work closely with the German division of the business and make regular presentations to the Executive Board in Pennsylvania, USA. Although well-travelled and an experienced manager, it was felt that some very specific one-to-one coaching on cross

cultural awareness would refine and develop the multicultural skills of the manager. An initial chemistry meeting set the objectives for coaching, followed by six coaching sessions over an 8 month period of time. A combination of face to face (usually at a suitable location near Heathrow airport) and video conference sessions, supported with emails and short telephone calls, meant all objectives were achieved. VBL also facilitated a Culture Active profile for the Country Manager to help them understand their own cultural profile and make comparisons with countries such as Germany and the USA.

## The Outcomes

Having an Executive Coach, for a set period of time, paid for by the

company was very motivating for the India Country Manager. Together with the coach, they were able to work on developing a range of multicultural skills identified in feedback from the Executive Board, from other senior managers and from the self-assessment cross cultural profile. The Executive Board are delighted with the improved quality of communication through reports and live presentations now given. The use of language and the style has changed significantly so that all recipients have a much clearer understanding and awareness of the India business. Relationships are stronger and the trust and rapport between divisions of the business have improved significantly.

By Karen Frost

Director of Operations at Values Based Leadership



Karen Frost

## Our Favourite Videos and Articles

[Cross cultural communication - Pellegrino Riccardi](#)

[Meet the Culture Builders - Jane Sparrow](#)

# Effective Storytelling: How to take people to action (and keep them performing)

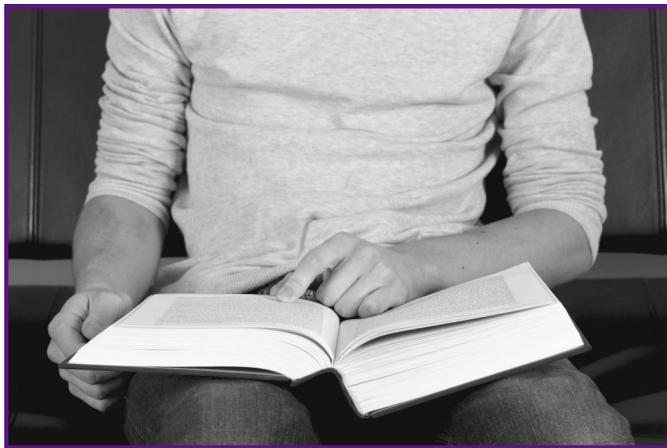
Storytelling is a powerful way for managers to spark the desire and willingness in others to take action. In fact, being able to influence people this way is one of the stand-out behaviours that sets great managers apart from good managers. But what do we mean by Storytelling and why does it matter so much?

Storytelling has become something of a buzzword recently with many organisations seeing a 'corporate narrative' as the next big thing. However, developing the confidence and competence of individuals to use stories as a way of engaging others in day-to-day language is much more than a

phase. Jane Sparrow identified the role of Storyteller in her book, *The Culture Builders: Leadership Strategies for Employee Engagement*, as one of five core roles that line managers need to effectively adopt to build and sustain high performance in people.

She defines a Storyteller as someone who can weave every-day examples into their communication in such a way that it helps people connect the dots, see the bigger picture – and take action. So, whilst many organisations believe they are 'telling stories', the real challenge is, what are these stories

actually achieving? It's only when the right stories are told in the right way, and for the right reasons, that managers succeed in igniting a deeper, more emotional spark that resonates with people. Stories can shift perceptions and create a moment of personal connection that people seek. But they've got to be the right stories.



Using The Culture Builders Engagement Intelligence Profiling tool and theory from the book, Values Based Leadership has worked to train and develop global leaders to become more effective storytellers and help make their stories count for more than just hearing an interesting, enter-

taining anecdote, or a stream of impressive facts. Using the profiling tool, we've helped individuals to see where they have strengths in storytelling and where there might be opportunities to build the skill further.

## Finding the Emotional Connection

Both Values Based Leadership and The Culture Builders have found, through their work, that one of the key barriers to effective story-telling is using metaphor and using personal stories to go beyond the rational narrative. Detail and process is all well →



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and good when people need to know things, but when you want to take them in a new direction with you...well, the story has to be a bit more compelling and meaningful.

This is often one of the key barriers Jane works with managers to help them influence and drive the performance of their teams. They might genuinely see and believe in the value of storytelling as a key manager role – but they don't have the *substance* to make it as effective as possible. This is an important distinction that The Culture Builders highlights in their bespoke profiling tool which was developed as a way to measure the key engagement skills of line managers. The profiling tool shows that, to be truly effective across each of the five roles (including that of Storyteller), managers need:

- A strong **belief** in the role i.e. I know this role is of key value to how I lead and manage my teams
- Making the commitment to consciously take **action** and do it – even though it might not come 'naturally'
- Drawing on one's experience of doing it, learning from it and so on until it forms the very **substance** of how you manage others

Take for example, Karen's recent experience of working with one of Values Based Leadership's clients. The company was keen to develop their managers' storytelling skills but the technically-minded culture meant that the stories themselves were presented more as facts and information.

**“It's only when the right stories are told in the right way, and for the right reasons, that managers succeed in igniting a deeper, more emotional spark that resonates with people. Stories can shift perceptions and create a moment of personal connection that people seek.”**

By using The Culture Builders Engagement Intelligence Profiling tool as part of a larger workshop to address their organisation's culture, Karen was able to encourage individuals to share inspiring stories about their organisation. One memorable story was about a retired employee who still, to

this day, cycles from his home to the front gates of the organisation's offices each morning. When he had worked there he cycled to work each morning and upon reaching retirement he maintained the exercise for both fitness purposes and for the feeling of enjoyment he felt travelling to an organisation he loved working for.

**“She defines a Storyteller as someone who can weave every-day examples into their communication in such a way that it helps people connect the dots, see the bigger picture – and take action.”**

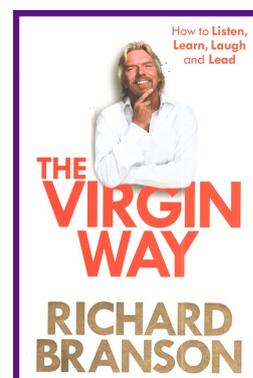
It is these types of story's which connect employees to the organisation and engage them in it's purpose. →

## Book Review

### The Virgin Way by Richard Branson

*The Virgin Way* contains powerful lessons for anyone working in business. Branson discusses subjects such as the importance of listening, learning and how to keep people engaged with the business. The book also focuses on the importance of creating a working environment that is fun, where staff can be sure they are listened to, and how this can be used as a way to build teamwork, passion and loyalty. I particularly enjoyed learning that Branson doesn't have a fixed office which he expects employees to travel to; he instead makes an effort to visit his employees at their location. It is these details which have helped Branson create a Virgin culture in which employees feel "valued, empowered and trusted" so they can "go out and make amazing things happen".

Whilst *The Virgin Way* didn't present a challenging read, I would recommend this book because there are important lessons that both leaders and aspiring leaders can use to improve their leadership style and develop a more positive culture in their organisation.



Reviewed by Laura Robertshaw  
Values Based Leadership  
Publisher: Virgin Books

## Becoming a Better Storyteller

One of the biggest stumbling blocks to building a more story-focused culture is the simple fact that so many managers aren't supported to undertake this role. They don't know how and they worry they aren't good at telling stories – so they don't. This is something Jane believes is less about being the perfect Storyteller and more about creating the right story. As she says, "There is absolutely nothing wrong with 'picking up' a great story you might have heard from another colleague or in a book or on the TV – and using it to create a version that fits for you.



Karen Frost

I always encourage managers to make a point of jotting down snippets and stories into a notebook and to refer to them for inspiration and triggers to build the right story for them."

### Using metaphors and analogies

A really effective way to super-charge stories is to add metaphors and analogies. These are powerful language devices that make stories stand out and help people see the issue in a new light. For example, a leader The Culture Builders recently worked with was keen for his very successful organisation to understand the imperative of continuing to look forward and keep ahead. "It's no good being the

best at making carts if the company down the road is laying rail track," he said. Short, simple but effective: everyone knows exactly what he is saying because the metaphor is, in effect, saying it for him.

**"It is these types of story's which connect employees to the organisation and engage them in it's purpose."**

Finally...

The main thing to remember with the role of Storyteller is to use it as an opportunity to show, rather than tell. Paint the picture, set the scene, map out the journey: whatever it is that you need to do, make sure you use colour and emotion to help people 'visualise' what you are saying. Once they can 'see' your story, they stand a much better chance of believing in it.



Jane Sparrow

### By Karen Frost & Jane Sparrow

Karen Frost - Director of Operations at Values Based Leadership

Jane Sparrow - A consultant and author specialising in transformational change, engagement and sustainable performance.

## Final Thoughts

*"The man who moves a mountain begins by carrying small stones"*

- **Chinese proverb**

*"The function of leaders is to create more leaders, not more followers"*

- **Ralph Nader**

*"If you are not willing to risk the usual you will have to settle for the ordinary"*

- **Jim Rohn**

*"You must expect great things of yourself before you can do them"*

- **Michael Jordan**



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