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Diversity at Work: The Practice of Inclusion

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CHAPTER FOUR

Strengthening Interpersonal Awareness and Fostering Relational Eloquence

Ilene C. Wasserman

> *Communication is about meaning . . . but not just in a passive sense of perceiving messages. Rather, we live lives filled with meanings, and one of our life challenges is to manage those meanings so that we can make our social worlds coherent and live within them with honor and respect. But this process of managing our meanings is never done in isolation. We are always and necessarily coordinating the way we manage our meanings with other people. (Pearce, 2012, p. 4)*

Recently, I was talking with a client about a strategic planning process to engage the whole organization that would, at the same time, impact people's everyday relationships. The CEO was committed to creating a more inclusive organization where everyone recognized his or her role in fulfilling the mission. He saw this process as "mission-critical." As we were reviewing the day's work over dinner, he turned to us and said: "Sometimes I feel like I am talking French and they are talking English." Given that this organization is located in the United States, his comment was both metaphorical and poetic. Each day, I am reminded that creating shared meaning that is coherent and coordinated requires a well-developed capacity to attend to others and to notice what patterns

we are creating. We are in a constant process of choosing to engage in collaboration, conflict, or appreciation in our words and actions as we navigate our relationships. The challenge is to become aware of our choices and skilled in enacting the behaviors that lead to our intended outcomes.

The central questions I address in this chapter include:

- What interpersonal processes minimize destructive conflict and maximize the ability of dyads (and teams) to use their differences as a source of strength and effectiveness?
- What are the key competencies and tools, frameworks and practices for people to engage effectively across difference so as to leverage diversity for mutual benefit?
- How can these competencies be acquired, maintained, practiced, and developed?

This chapter describes what each of us can do, as we engage with each other, to enact inclusion. (I use the term *we* colloquially to refer to you, the reader, and me, the author, as I address the ongoing challenges and opportunities of inclusion.) I begin by addressing how we can be more competent with others—particularly those whose personal styles and cultural histories differ from our own. I articulate a shift in the notion of communication as primarily a process of transmitting meaning, to communication as an ongoing process of jointly creating meaning. This shift is consequential because it moves our attention from one person's responsibility to be clear, or the other's not getting it, to the shared and relational responsibility for clarity (McNamee & Gergen, 1999).

I then describe how key competencies for engaging effectively across differences may be acquired, practiced, and developed for mutual benefit and effectiveness. I offer specific tools for enhancing agility in noticing critical moments in relationships—those moments when not coordinating or connecting can be particularly consequential—and to intentionally make better choices in the next moment—choices that enhance our relationships with each other. Finally, I suggest processes that support interpersonal and relational practices for creating shared meaning.

Communicating in Global Context

As we engage across complex personal, positional, and cultural differences, both challenges and opportunities are created. (The term *culture* as used here refers to the attributes, heritage, beliefs, norms, and values of a group of people that are shared and largely learned.) The communication perspective provides a key lens for seeing these challenges and opportunities by highlighting patterns we create together and by providing tools for looking at those patterns together to enable us to shift and improve the quality of relationships that support more desired outcomes. Looking at the patterns we create together requires the capacity and agility to move back and forth between the first- and third-person perspective: from being in the conversation to looking at the conversation. After elaborating on the communication perspective, I further address this developmental capacity as critical to inclusive engagement with the complexity of our diverse social worlds and to fostering relational eloquence.

The Communication Perspective

There was a time when communication implied sending a message for another person to receive. If a message was not received, it was assumed that either the sender needed to be clearer in what was articulated or the receiver needed to be a better listener. In *Communication and the Human Condition*, W. Barnett Pearce (1989) coined a term: the *communication perspective* (p. 86). The communication perspective changes our notion of communication, from one of meaning being passed back and forth from one person to another—as if meaning were a tennis ball being lobbed between players—to something that people continuously make together. As seen from the communication perspective, meaning is influenced, in part, by the context of what came before and what follows. Each response refines and defines what has been said. For example, if I were to ask, "Would you do me a favor?" your response might vary based on the context of our relationship (including history, degree of intimacy and mutuality, cultural frame, and so on), or what preceded my request. In some cases, we might have a pattern of

being there for each other, such that your automatic response would be "Sure!" In other cases, we might have a pattern of unfulfilled expectations; your response, in the context of a pattern lacking in mutuality, might be, "I am not sure I have the time." This response might create a pattern of reluctance. Or you might say: "*Again?*!" with an exasperated and annoyed tone. What pattern would that be creating? We make patterns all the time. Sometimes people make relationships and connections; sometimes we make insults or conflict; and often, we make incomplete meanings or misunderstanding.

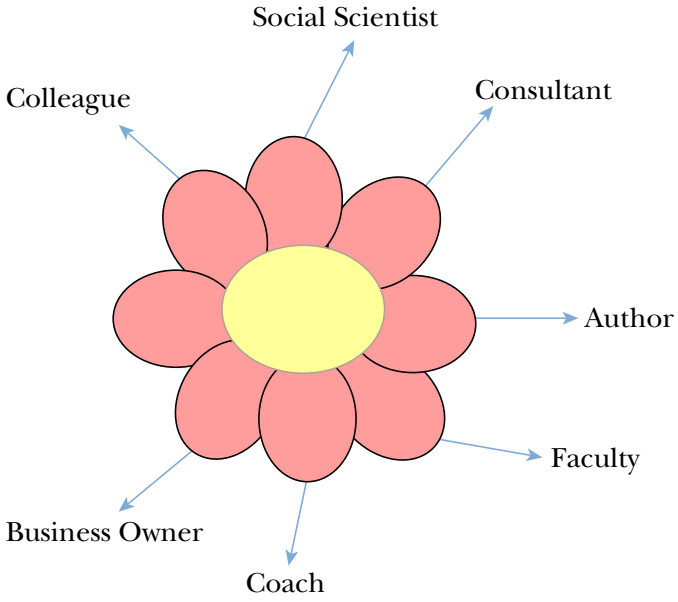
It is quite common to take for granted what occurs in our everyday encounters. We may assume ease in understanding each other when we speak the same language and challenges when we do not. Yet I often hear people echo some version of what my client said: "Sometimes it feels harder to communicate with someone who speaks the same language!"

The Complexity of Meaning-Making in the Context of Differences

There are so many factors involved when considering meaning-making in the context of cultural differences that the process is often quite complex. When two people meet, each person brings a history that is influenced, in large part, by the story he or she has woven from personal experiences as well as the histories and cultures he or she has inherited. In this regard, Ferdman (2000) distinguishes between cultural identity at the group versus the individual level: "[C]ultural identity at the group level is the image shared by group members of the features that are distinctive or emblematic of the group. At the individual level, cultural identity is the reflection of culture as it is constructed by each of us" (p. 20). One implication is that even when we share a particular social identity with another person, we may each construct it differently in our personal narrative (Ferdman, 1995, 2003; see also Ferdman & Roberts, Chapter 3, this volume).

At the individual level, we bring multiple social group affiliations—among them gender, race, religion, ethnicity, nationality, education, sexual orientation, and age—to each encounter. We also bring narratives collected from our life experiences. The

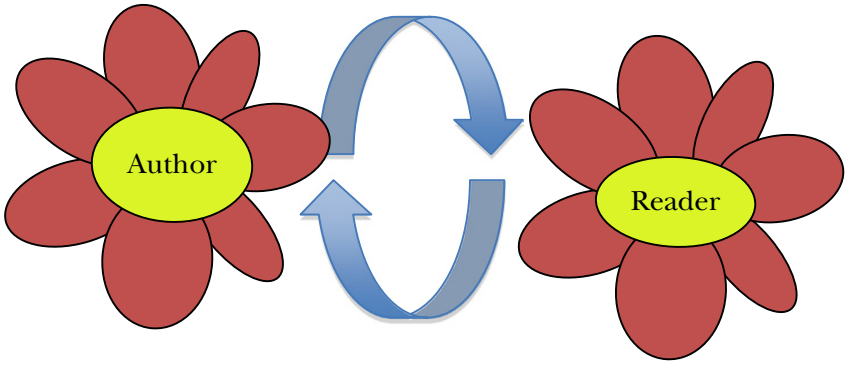
Figure 4.1. My Social Group Affiliations Influencing This Chapter



stories we have inherited and have lived are among the influences we call to the fore when we are connecting in the moment with each other. We may look at these influences as if they were petals of a daisy (Pearce, 1989). For example, the identity influences that are most pronounced for me as I write this chapter are my experience as a consultant to organizations, as a writer, as a social scientist, as a colleague, as a business owner, as a faculty member, and as a coach (see Figure 4.1).

Yet the petals on the metaphorical daisies of our encounters are not necessarily constant. As with the petals of an actual daisy, there are also aspects of my narrative that are in the background as I write this chapter, such as being a spouse, a mother, a friend, a Jewish woman, and a dog lover. At any moment—for example, when my daughter calls, or my dog needs a walk—one of those petals may shift into the foreground. Our narrative shifts in relationship to the social context and the particular relationship in which we are engaging. What might you label your own petals as you read this chapter? Note that, in Figure 4.2, your "daisy" stands in relationship to mine, because you are thinking about your identities as you engage with this text I have written.

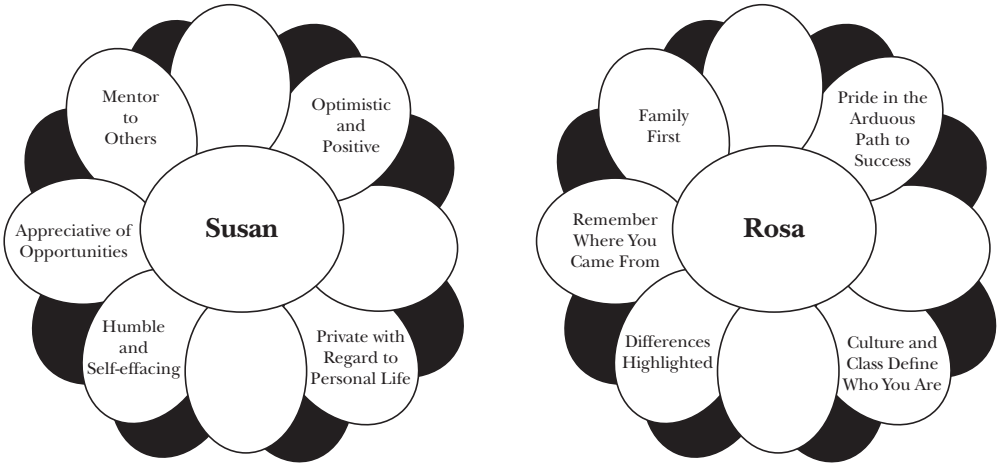
Figure 4.2. Daisies in Relationship



More recently, the literature on social identity has expanded to include the ways in which our various group affiliations influence each other in how we narrate our stories. Holvino (2001), for example, indicates that "a poststructuralist approach to race, gender, and class is more interested in understanding the *intersectionality*, rather than the intersection of these dimensions of difference, emphasizing that the way in which the intersection is experienced and lived is dependent on particular circumstances and is always contextual and shifting" (p. 22, italics in the original). For example, we may both be women, but the value we place on ethnicity or religion may be qualitatively different and be consequential to how we narrate being a woman. The value of being middle-aged or over sixty varies by the contexts of culture and nationality (see also Ferdman, 1995, 2000; Holvino, 2010). Gallegos and Ferdman (2007, 2012; see also Ferdman & Gallegos, 2001) broadened this already complex picture, highlighting the contextual factors that influence identity, such as socioeconomic class, association or affiliation with the dominant culture, education, and other such factors.

The concept of intersectionality brings to the fore how identities are ranked in society and in our organizations and the associated power dynamics that therefore are at play in our interpersonal encounters. In one setting, one aspect of our identity may be central or dominant, whereas in another context or at another time the same aspect may be marginalized. For example, being multilingual has become highly valued in organizations that do business globally. Yet there was a time, not too long ago, when

Figure 4.3. Susan and Rosa



speaking Spanish at a company based in the United States was forbidden. Our identities are disadvantaged or privileged depending on the context.

In another example, I examine Susan and Rosa's relationship (see Figure 4.3). Susan is a senior manager of a medical technology organization. She expresses a lot of optimism and is committed not only to her own continued growth and development but to those of others as well. As an immigrant from China, she has had many opportunities and is eager to learn how she can help others. Rosa is a supervisor in the same organization. She rose through its ranks to a managerial position, having started as a janitor. Rosa was born in Puerto Rico and considers her success to be an important model for other Latinas. She often tells her story of her humble beginnings as a way to inspire others. As Rosa's mentor, Susan advised her not to tell people about her background, as it may make a bad impression. Rosa interprets Susan's advice as an insult. Susan wonders why Rosa doesn't value her advice. Without a conversation to explore how their differences are creating a misunderstanding, an episode that could be a rich learning opportunity can become one of mutual resentment.

The conceptualization of intersectionality informs how we understand the simultaneous influences of our multiple social group affiliations. We are continually combining these affiliations

and identities in different ways, at different times, and in different relationships. With Susan and Rosa, it occurs in a mentoring relationship. Susan has positional power over Rosa. She may not realize that Rosa believes Susan's advice to be imposing judgment that it is not appropriate to share one's personal story. They are perpetuating a pattern of misunderstanding. Perhaps if Susan and Rosa were to step back and look at the pattern they are making and speak about what they prefer to create, they would have a different outcome. Their conversation also might help them recognize similar misunderstandings with other colleagues and, in some instances, family members.

The way the dimensions of our identity interact to narrate our relationship is in part a composite of our personal histories and in part a composite of the stories we tell about ourselves. Yet our stories are influenced by stories of others with whom we connect. Sometimes we are aware of how our stories change, but many times we are not. When I was working in Oklahoma, I thought about myself in terms of my role as a consultant, but once I opened my mouth, others defined me by where I was from, due to my New York accent. Once I realized how being a New Yorker influenced my encounters with others, I was able to take that into consideration. For example, I was attentive to how fast I spoke or what expressions I used. Our relationship with others is influenced not only by our stories of ourselves, but also by the stories we create about others, as well as the stories we create about the culture in which we live. At any given moment, we are some of, more than, all of, and just one of our particular affiliations or identities.

These multiple dimensions of diversity include personal traits, function or level, and cultural identity. One's personal and cultural history influences what one does, says, or enacts in any given moment and what others do, say, or enact in response based on their stories of their own histories and of yours. I may walk into a client's office with my story of myself as a consultant, and the client's first response to me might be influenced by her experience with White women of a certain age with a certain hairstyle. If her past experience with someone who looked like me was affirming, we have a head start! If it was negative, we have problems even before we open our mouths to speak. Either way, I

might sense something in the client's response that I cannot quite understand. Working effectively with each other requires a well-developed capacity to attend to the continuous process of coordinating with each other. Given the multiple influences that are activated at any moment, we need guidance that supports a greater capacity to create shared meaning in the ongoing processes of relating.

The communication perspective suggests that meanings shift shape, changing from moment to moment. Pearce (1989, 2004) describes three interlocking realities we enact as we coordinate meaning: (1) coherence—that is, telling stories that help us make sense of our lives and help us know how to go on; (2) coordinating with others through a sequence of actions that seem logical and appropriate; and (3) mystery. Pearce (1989) defines mystery as, among other things, the "celebration of . . . ineffability" (p. 80), "the recognition of the limits of the stories in which we are enmeshed" (p. 84), and "a quality of experience of the human world, characterized by rapt attention, open-mindedness, [and] a sense of wonder" (p. 84). Pearce's allusions to mystery are from a positive frame; nevertheless, mystery in relationships, particularly with others whose social narratives are different from our own, can be disconcerting, even disorienting.

I have written about moments of dissonance (Wasserman, 2004) as being those times we find ourselves asking: "What just happened?" It may be that one asks about another's family as a way of warming up to a new business relationship, only to discover that asking such a question is considered either intrusive by the other person or even inappropriate in that person's culture. This is yet another version of one speaking French and another speaking English. Somehow, often through a visceral feeling, we realize we have crossed a line or broken some unspoken rule.

In some cultures, asserting a personal position or opinion is considered appropriate—even desirable—yet in other cultures, the value of group harmony takes precedence. We take our own norms for granted as the way things ought to be done. The response we choose to make—for example, standing out versus blending in with the group because that is what we have been encouraged to do—influences what we make in the next moment. Depending on what our taken-for-granted norms are, we may or

may not find that behavior distasteful. When people relate across cultures, there are many opportunities for misunderstandings as they interpret others' behaviors and actions according to their own taken-for-granted frames of reference.

Think of the last time you were engaging with another and wished you could have pressed a rewind button to start all over again. You had the best of intentions, but somehow the other's response created a meaning wholly different from what you had anticipated or intended. Depending on the weight of the moment, such misunderstandings can have fleeting or profound implications.

Given how critical it is to foster positive relationships across differences in our daily lives, especially when the goal is inclusion, how can we develop our capacity to both pause and reflect while we are engaged with each other so as to make better choices about what we are making together? The communication perspective shifts our focus from the words themselves and their presentation to what we are making in the processes of relating. A friend of mine who is a neuropsychologist is also, in his spare time, an aspiring watercolorist. Recently he was selected to spend a year learning with a master artist. In his very first assignment, the master artist asked the student to paint a still life, with the caveat that the student was to attend to the relationship among the shapes rather than attend to the shapes themselves. Similarly, I invite you, in your next conversation, to consider attending to what is being made in the back-and-forth of the space between or among the two of you. If, for example, you are offering a colleague feedback, you can be creating trust and support, or you can be creating criticism and competition. As you look at what you are making in relationships, consider that what is emerging is something you are creating together. What happens next is a matter of choice in terms of how you listen and what you choose to say next. In any turn-by-turn process, you have the choice to assert your intentions and your being right, or you can do something different.

Capacity for Complexity

Looking at what we are making when we are engaged with each other requires the capacity to observe and reflect at the same time

that we are engaged. This is a complex accomplishment. According to Kegan (1982, 1994), our capacity to look at the process of narrating rather than to be captured by our story is a developmental accomplishment. Constructive-developmental theory frames the process of development as an increasing capacity for complexity. This capacity involves the ability to distinguish and make that which is "subject"—that which we are identified with—into "object"—something we can look at, reflect on, and take responsibility for and integrate with some other way of knowing. It is not just having new ideas about things; rather, it is about coming to a new way of knowing how one knows. This is one of the opportunities offered by dialogue with another who is different. Kegan (2000) offers another example of the subject-object distinction, with regard to feelings. Typically, our language suggests that we have feelings. More often, however, our feelings have us. When engaging with another, we can be deterred by dissonance or we can pause and ask a question that shifts both of us to look at the dissonance and make sense of it together.

Kegan (1994) identifies five levels that distinguish ways of knowing. Levels 1 and 2 address ways of knowing from birth through childhood. At levels 1 and 2, there is no differentiation of self and other. At level 3, one can think abstractly and view one's own interests in the context of one's relationships. This shift typically manifests in adolescence and early adulthood. Although consequences are considered, typically at this stage the person is unable to reconcile conflicting points of view and may frame differences in beliefs and values in terms of polarities, such as right and wrong, or good people versus bad people. Those whose ways of knowing are at level 3 often limit their consideration of what is acceptable to those ideas that align with their own belief system. They are likely to judge quite harshly those whose perspectives or beliefs contradict their own. When encountering differences in relationships, this level manifests as holding an "us versus them" mindset, in which people "like us" are right and good and those who see or do things differently are seen as wrong or bad. A specific example of this could be one's culturally derived beliefs and behavior about timeliness; for some, being on time is a moral issue, while for others, relationships matter more than watching the clock.

When people hold competing views, whether about something mundane or something rather significant, and do not have the capacity to address the differences, the results can be destructive to creating and sustaining quality partnerships and ultimately inclusion.

Kegan (1994) calls the fourth level of cognitive complexity self-authoring. At this level, the person has the capacity to reflect, evaluate, and shift based on his or her own assessment, rather than depending on others to determine whether things are going well and what needs to be different. At level 4, one can take a meta-perspective of situations and therefore can view competing positions within a systemic framework that permits seeing the value of each. In the earlier example related to conceptions of time, one at this level would demonstrate the capacity for multiple, equally valid positions about the meaning of time and willingness to consider the other when apparent differences arise.

According to Kegan, few people achieve the capacity for the degree of complexity described by level 5, which is referred to as *trans-systemic*. At this level, one's perspective is considered incomplete, or as only one aspect of the fuller narrative. One's ways of knowing are open to being influenced by—and potentially enriched in consideration of—those of another.

Consider the capacity necessary for engaging another whose cultural rules and histories are different from our own. When we meet for the first time, we do not begin with a blank slate. We bring to our moment of meeting some history of attributions that may or may not facilitate a connection. For example, a leader introducing herself to her staff for the first time brings her own sense of self and story about who she is, who she has been, and her hopes for the potential of what she and her staff can do together. Her hopes are only as inspiring as what is measured by the response of her staff, then how she responds to them, and so forth. Each of us brings our own story of "people like us" whom we have known. One's story may be of an inspiring leader who was able to coalesce a group of individuals into a high-performing team. Another may bring a story of concern and doubt. These are but two possibilities for what we make together. In either case, we are never fully in charge of the narrative we aspire to create.

Knowing Ourselves and Each Other Through Storytelling

Stories provide a scaffold to meaning that both enables and constrains relating. From the social construction perspective, social group identities are inherited and reproduced through stories—those we narrate about others, each other, and ourselves. These stories are continuously evolving and emerging at multiple levels, including the interpersonal, the intergroup, and the systemic. To strengthen our capacity to foster inclusion in our interpersonal relationships, it is important to coordinate the way we narrate our stories.

Imagine that you just left a meeting with five others. You run into another colleague who was supposed to be there but was pulled away for another meeting. She meets all of you in the cafeteria and asks what happened. One person talks about the style of the meeting. Another person talks about his feelings about the meeting. Yet another reiterates decisions made at the meeting, and another compares the meeting to what would have happened at her former job. The hierarchy model of meanings (Pearce, 2004) emphasizes the idea that there are multiple contexts within which communication acts occur: "communication occurs at several levels simultaneously, and . . . some of these stories function as contexts for other stories" (Pearce, 2007, p. 141). These contextual stories usually have to do with personal and group identities, with the relationships among the people in the situation, with the situation or communication act itself, and with the various organizations or cultures involved (Pearce, 2004).

Consider the implications in a performance review. Tom, the supervisor, may be focused on the individual, the position being reviewed, the economics of the organization, the developmental needs of this person in the context of the team, and other similar considerations. Yet Jeff, the person being reviewed, feels marginalized due to being the only person on the team who is over forty years old. Jeff hears all the feedback through the context of age and being on the margins, as that is most front and center for him. At first, Tom just keeps talking and hoping Jeff will understand. Jeff keeps responding, hoping that if he keeps explaining

how his performance is affected by feeling marginalized, Tom will understand. Like many others, the two hope that if they keep talking, they will eventually connect. Instead, frustration builds. In this case, Tom notices that the conversation is out of sync, and he shifts from harping on the message to suggesting that they step back and look at their conversation. Doing so, they are able to name how they have been framing the conversation and recognize each other's points of view.

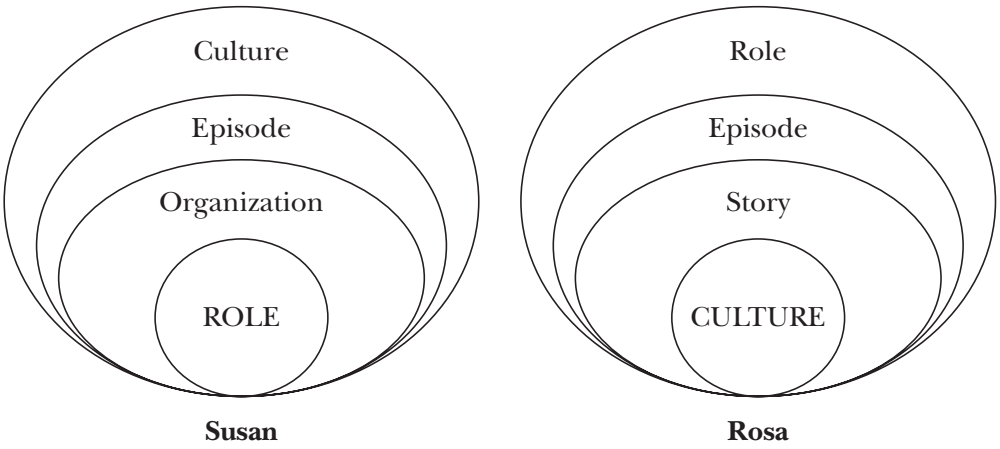
The stories we tell ourselves as we relate with others are complex. Although we engage hoping to foster shared meaning, there are many potentially unknown, untold, unheard, and even untellable stories that render our attempts to understand each other unfinished. Coordinating with others and creating coherence involves being attentive to what we are creating together, validating the stories we hearing, and exploring places that seem to be puzzling or mysterious.

Shifting to Relational Eloquence

Pearce (1989) distinguishes three forms of communication: monocultural, ethnocentric, and cosmopolitan. Each is a form of coordinating meaning in the process of relating. Monocultural communication implies "acting as if there were only one culture" (Pearce, 1989, p. 93). By treating the other as if he or she were the same as us, the unique qualities of the other are made to be invisible or are not valued. Ethnocentric communication "means viewing other cultures from the perspective of one's own" (p. 120) and references one's sense of *we* in relationship to and in contrast to *them*. Cosmopolitan communication is a quality of relating that demonstrates a commitment to coordinating meaning with another without denying the unique existence or humanity of the other, and without deprecating the other's way. It shifts attention to a commitment to relating, a social eloquence, rather than imposing oneself on another (Pearce, 1994).

Let's return to Susan and Rosa. Rosa places more emphasis on group identity and history; Susan emphasizes the rules of the organization's culture as primary to guide her actions, with her role as further refinement of what those actions might entail. Figure 4.4 depicts the contrasting hierarchies of meaning for Susan and for

Figure 4.4. Hierarchy Model: Susan and Rosa



Note: For Susan, her role is the most defining context for their encounter. Second is the organization, third is the episode, and last is her culture. For Rosa, her culture is primary, her story is next, the episode is third, and her role is last.

Rosa. Susan views her role as the most defining context for their encounter. The next most important defining context for her is the organization, third is the episode, and last is her culture. In contrast, for Rosa, culture is primary, her story is next, the episode is third, and her role is last. Identifying the ways Rosa and Susan are missing each other required them to make a commitment to pause—and together look at how they were narrating their respective stories. Taking the opportunity to look at their different ways of ordering contexts and their consequent way of making meaning greatly enhanced their work relationship. Noticing their differences moved the quality of their relating from ethnocentric toward cosmopolitan communication.

Fostering interpersonal practices for inclusion involves the capacity to acknowledge others and to take the perspective of another without necessarily surrendering one's own perspective. Oliver (1996) describes systemic eloquence as the ability to make moment-by-moment choices about how we respond, especially in the face of the unexpected. *Systemic eloquence* highlights the relational commitments of attending to how one contributes to the experience of another. This includes being mindful of patterns of engaging that may interfere with relating and holding a

commitment to collaboration while attending to the variety of contexts in which we are involved: "In calling such mindfulness *critical consciousness*, attention is drawn to the *interpretive act* and the opportunities it provides for reflection and reflexivity" (Oliver, 2004, p. 130, italics in the original).

The concept of relational eloquence (Wasserman, 2005) builds on Oliver's term to highlight the capacity involved in turning "the spotlight from the individualistic cognitive perspective (or what happens in my head) to the between or relational arena, or—what we make together" (p. 40). By looking at what we are making together, we are less likely to get caught up in making blame—and more apt to honor multiple perspectives.

The complexity of our encounters requires a degree of interpersonal competence, a capacity for complexity that may or may not have been part of our social skills education. The next section highlights frameworks and models that support interpersonal practices for inclusion.

Frameworks and Models That Support Interpersonal Practices for Inclusion

Interpersonal practices to support inclusion require both a commitment to engage with another who may see the world in a way different from one's own, and the capacity to do so. In this section, I discuss three frameworks that support interpersonal practices for inclusion—empathy, emotional and social intelligence, and mindfulness. This discussion is supported by three models—the daisy model, the hierarchy model, and the storytelling model (Pearce, 2004)—that can further support critical reflection in the service of inclusion. Together, these frameworks and models can help improve and sustain cosmopolitan communication—a commitment to coordinate meaning with others, particularly those whose way of framing things is significantly different from one's own. They are also essential in developing relational eloquence, the process of continuously expanding how one frames one's own story in relationship to the story of another (Wasserman, 2004), which involves broadening the context so that even conflicting narratives can be considered together. Here, I elaborate on how to use these models

and frameworks to support inclusion through self-awareness and relational eloquence.

Empathy

In the early 1970s, Carl Rogers and Martin Buber engaged deeply in a series of dialogues to explore the connection between what Buber (1958) called an I-Thou relationship and what Rogers described as empathy. Through a series of intense public dialogues, they came to some shared definitions of empathy that clearly reflected their influence on one another. Buber (1947) wrote: "Empathy means, if anything . . . that this one person, without forfeiting anything of the felt reality of his activity, at the same time lives through the common event from the standpoint of the other" (pp. 114–115).

Rogers (1980) acknowledged shifting his definition of empathy from a state of being empathic to a process. According to him, empathy involves "entering the private perceptual world of the other and becoming thoroughly at home in it . . . being sensitive, moment by moment, to the changing felt meanings which flow in this other person, to the fear or rage or tenderness or confusion or whatever that he or she is experiencing. . . . It includes communicating your sensings [*sic*] of the person's world as you look with fresh and unfrightened eyes . . ." (p. 142).

In both of these frameworks of empathy, there is a sense that forming a connection with others consists of taking their perspective without necessarily changing one's own. Rather, one demonstrates the capacity to hold both. This is not easy when engaging others whose social worlds are informed by different forms of interpretation. More often, rather than an empathic process, the engagement with another whose social world is significantly different creates confusion and mystery. The next section expands this discussion with an overview of emotional and social intelligence.

Emotional and Social Intelligence

The concepts of emotional and social intelligence were mentioned in the literature as early as 1920, with Thorndike's

definition of social intelligence as "the ability to understand and manage men and women, boys and girls—to act wisely in human relations" (p. 228). Emotional intelligence was initially defined by Peter Salovey and John Mayer (1990) as "the subset of social intelligence that involves the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them, and to use this information to guide one's thinking and action" (p. 189, italics in original removed). They have since revised their definition to: "The ability to perceive accurately, appraise, and express emotion; the ability to access and/or generate feelings when they facilitate thought; the ability to understand emotion and emotional knowledge; and the ability to regulate emotions to promote emotional and intellectual growth" (Mayer & Salovey, 1997, p. 10). According to Mayer and Salovey (1997), emotional intelligence involves abilities that can be categorized into five domains: self-awareness, managing emotions, empathy, handling relationships, and motivating oneself. Goleman (1995) popularized the notion of emotional intelligence as a key personal and professional competency and identified its five components at work as motivation, empathy, social skills, self-awareness, and self-regulation (Goleman, 1998).

The popularization of emotional and social intelligence as core workplace competencies associates self-awareness and relational skills with being "smart." The expansion of the definition of intelligence to include self-awareness and relational skills thus values investing in interpersonal practices that support inclusion. Further, the various emotional intelligence assessment and feedback instruments invite the conversation that encourages development of the "observing self" (Deikman, 1982, as cited by Marlatt & Kristeller, 1999)—the capacity to note how we are thinking or feeling at any given time. I build on this concept of the observing self in the next section on mindfulness.

Mindfulness in the Face of Microaggressions

Siegel (2006), citing Kabat-Zinn (2005), defines mindfulness as "paying attention, in the present moment, on purpose, without grasping onto judgments. Mindful awareness has the quality of receptivity to whatever arises within the mind's eye, moment to

moment" (p. 250). He goes on to indicate that, with mindful practices, "empathy, compassion, and interpersonal sensitivity seem to be improved. People who develop this capacity also develop a deeper sense of well-being and what can be considered a form of mental coherence" (Siegel, 2006, p. 250).

Mindfulness, a form of paying attention that originated in Eastern meditation practices (Nhất Hạnh, 1975), has become popular as a way of quieting our minds in the face of overstimulation. It has been described as "bringing one's complete attention to the present experience on a moment to moment basis" (Marlatt & Kristeller, 1999, p. 68) and as "paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally" (Kabat-Zinn, 1994, p. 4). Mindfulness is considered a form of working out our reflective muscles to help us detach from triggers and move into inquiry.

In the course of the workday, there are potential triggers that challenge our capacity to engage with the fullness and expansiveness we have been discussing. Consider the following example: A group of senior leaders were enjoying a retreat designed for personal and professional development. Although there was a strong sense of camaraderie, the small group of women noted, among themselves, moments when their comments and guidance were unheard or not acknowledged. During a debrief of one of the activities, one of the women was encouraged by the others to voice the perception that on several occasions women's suggestions were passed over, only to be welcomed when later presented by a man. She went on to say that she frequently receives complaints from women in her organization that they do not feel recognized for their contributions and that frequently, someone from the nondominant culture makes a suggestion but it does not get heard until a person from the dominant culture reiterates the point.

The women in this example experienced a series of what has been referred to as microaggressions (Sue, 2010). Sue et al. (2007) describe microaggressions as "brief, everyday exchanges that send denigrating messages to people of color because they belong to a racial minority group. In the world of business, the term 'micro-inequities' is used to describe the pattern of being overlooked, underrespected, and devalued because of one's race or gender.

Microaggressions are often unconsciously delivered in the form of subtle snubs or dismissive looks, gestures, and tones. These exchanges are so pervasive and automatic in daily conversations and interactions that they are often dismissed and glossed over as being innocent and innocuous" (p. 273). Perpetrators of microaggressions—which can be targeted based on race, gender, or other social identities—are often unaware that they engage in such communications.

As we consider the scenario just described, what is the typical response to microaggressions at work? I have heard clients suggest that the choices they make are influenced by fear of reprisal, self-protectiveness, and concern for appearing to be the "victim." How does one determine when to speak up and how? How might one craft a response and frame the conversation to spark mutual curiosity to support mutual learning? The challenge is to notice when we are activated by fear or a sense of threat and to pause to look at our feelings, rather than, as Kegan (1982, 1994) would say, to be our feelings.

An additional way is to be on the lookout for the triggering event. Brookfield (1987) identified a trigger event that is perplexing or discomforting as the first of five stages of a transformational change process. Mezirow (1991, 2000) talks about a disorienting dilemma as the first stage of transformative learning. Cranton (1992) identifies confusion and withdrawal as stages in the transformational learning process. Transformative learning is the consequence of following the triggering event or the disorienting dilemma with critical self-reflection. In my research, I expanded this model to address how to transform patterns in relationships. Critical reflection in relationship with others was consequential to transform undesirable patterns of relating (Wasserman, 2004). This reflection process is important because those involved move from being solely in the dynamic to also looking at the dynamic together. Standing at the boundary together, we are more apt to pause, to ask questions, to seek the counsel of others, and to make sense together.

Having the presence of mind to pause and reflect takes practice. I liken that practice to working out. We work out to strengthen our muscles so we are strong and ready. This form of practice focuses on strengthening the reflective muscles. Strengthening

the reflective muscles helps us to be awake to and to notice potential triggers and to respond at these critical moments with questions that prompt a stance of inquiry.

Models to Support Critical Reflection

The daisy model, the hierarchy model, and the storytelling model can be considered tools to support critical reflection with others. These tools help expand self-other awareness, so as to better understand each other and the dynamics at play in interpersonal interactions. Earlier in this chapter, I introduced the daisy model (Pearce, 2004), which can help identify the influences that are joining (or separating) us at any particular moment. In the example of the women experiencing the microaggressions, many came to their professions during a time when women experienced subtle discrimination on a regular basis. As a consequence of these experiences, some had strong inclinations to address these microaggressions and some had strong inclinations not to. Some had inclinations to raise a challenging conversation and some had strong desires to design generative conversation, the kind that generates new insights and possibilities. In that and similar situations, elaborating on the petals of the daisies of all involved, and in that way learning their respective histories and their hopes, can support shared meaning of the full range of differences and their implications.

The hierarchy of meaning (Pearce, 2004) emphasizes the idea that there are multiple contexts within which communication takes place. If the most important level of context to me is our relationship, and the most important level of context to you is being right, we will take very different approaches with each other. As with the earlier example (Susan and Rosa), standing back and naming those differences as well as identifying different priorities (such as when one is seeking shared understanding and another is seeking to be right) are critical to help guide us in how to go on together in constructive ways. As I noted earlier, the process of stepping back and observing their conversation together creates the possibility of viewing their different perspectives side by side.

Stories provide a scaffold to meaning that both enables and constrains relating. From the social construction perspective, social group identities are inherited and reproduced through stories—those we narrate about others, each other, and ourselves. These stories are continuously evolving and emerging at multiple levels, including the interpersonal, the intergroup, and the systemic. To strengthen our capacity to foster inclusion in our interpersonal relationships, it is important to coordinate the way we narrate our stories.

As noted earlier, people tell stories about themselves and their groups in an attempt to create coherence in their lives (Pearce & Pearce, 1998). The storytelling model provides a heuristic device for looking at all kind of stories and how they shape our process of meaning-making. There is storytelling about the stories that were lived together and the stories told or constructed by those involved. There are untold stories that, whether intentionally or unintentionally, do not present themselves. Because we cannot possibly hear everything, some stories go unheard while others are privileged. The stories we choose to tell are the ones that add meaning, and sometimes confusion, to our experiences. There are stories that are underdeveloped or eerily silent. There are stories that, in some contexts, are not allowed. For example, the storytelling about a hero is skewed toward amazing accomplishments. When honoring the hero, one may edit stories of shame. The different forms of stories provide a catalyst for inquiry to enrich and expand the stories we share and those we invite others to tell. In sharing our stories and inviting others to tell theirs, we are expanding how we know and understand each other and creating more inclusion.

In my work as a consultant and coach I often use these models as tools to guide the storytelling. As tools, these models expand the framing of the stories and the perspective or stance that the storytellers hold. Because meaning is created in our social relationships and is continuously produced in the processes of social interactions, changing our frames of reference, particularly in relationship with others who are different, is essential to support inclusion. Intentionally making space to hear the stories of those who are often marginalized enhances

the quality of relating, enriches inclusion, and helps develop relational eloquence.

Summary

Changing our frames of reference, particularly in relationship with others who are different from us, requires a particular set of skills for engagement. First, it requires relational agility, or the capacity to move from talking at to dialogic engaging or being with. Second, it calls for the ability to critically reflect on one's taken-for-granted assumptions or frameworks and to view them as one of many possibilities. Third, it requires one to hold one's own perspective at risk of being changed in relationship with those of others (Buber, 1958; Wasserman, 2004).

Relational eloquence (Wasserman, 2005)—the capacity to shift our attention from the individualistic cognitive perspective to the relational arena—requires a quality of and deep capacity for attending to others. Self-awareness and relational eloquence are like muscles: they need to be exercised. We enhance our self-awareness and relational eloquence by looking at what we are making together: noticing how our past experiences influence our interpreting in the moment; noting how we are framing the beginning, middle, and end of the stories we tell; and being aware of what contexts we highlight. Our stories are not likely to be the same. Rather, our lives are enriched by the many stories we encounter.

This chapter has highlighted the frameworks and models that help us recognize the complexity that is present in the engagement of multiple sources of differences in our relationships. The following three summary points, drawn from my prior work (Wasserman, 2005) can provide guidance to support interpersonal awareness and relational eloquence when engaging complex interpersonal and intergroup differences:

◦ "People want to be known. . . . The past must be acknowledged before moving on to the future. . . . Typically, those whose stories have been marginalized or muffled by the dominant discourse . . . are more present to their defining narratives than those whose story is echoed in the norms of everyday life" (p. 41).

◦ "People want to name themselves. . . . [E]ach of us wants to define ourselves in relationship with others, rather than be defined by others. Often, in the effort to understand others, we attribute all of what we know about that group to them, disregarding what they ascribe to themselves" (p. 41). To promote inclusion, notice and make an effort to learn how others tell their story.
◦ Relationships are strengthened when people have the opportunity to pause and reflect together. "The reflection process itself creates . . . opportunities that might otherwise be lost in the turn of the next moment. This is particularly significant when [those involved focus] on moments that are confusing or troubling. . . . When [people] engage these moments, the shared reflection is more likely to create [coherence and shared meaning]" (p. 42). In the process of group reflection prompted by questions that invite affirming narratives, each person's story of him- or herself expands when contextualized in relationship with the story of the other.

Relational eloquence involves the capacity to look at one's story along with another's (Wasserman, 2005). Strengthening interpersonal awareness and relational eloquence requires a deep commitment to pay attention and notice, to build the reflective muscles. This commitment is rewarded by the consequentiality of quality engagement. In making that engagement, we, together, make better and more inclusive social worlds.

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