

# From the individual to the organization: Our cultural roots affect our decisions

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## INTRODUCTION

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As professionals in organizations grapple with the wise management of resources, an understanding of how one's cultural roots affect decisions is the first step to including a broader range of perspectives in effective decision making. Choosing multiple perspectives is an essential intercultural skill, which leads to more creative and powerful decision making. In this presentation, I synthesize the literature in the areas of intercultural communication, organizational management, and intergroup relations.

## DISCUSSION

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All people have a culture, which is often just outside conscious awareness. The term "culture" refers to a set of cognitive, affective, and behavioural patterns shared by a group of people (Hall 1959). Some of the many dimensions of culture include age, gender, ethnicity, race, education, and income (Loden and Rosener 1991). People from different cultural groups have different perspectives, manifested in their values, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours. Numerous studies specifically describe these differences (Kluckhohn 1961; Hall 1983; Hofstede 1991; Triandis 1995). Core values and beliefs affect the decisions that people make. What the decision is, however, may differ depending on a person's value orientation.

Bringing one's own culture into conscious awareness is the first step toward building an organization that is inclusive of multiple perspectives. The people inside an effective, culturally diverse organization come from diverse cultural backgrounds and have a "voice" in the organization. Such an organization includes multiple perspectives on issues and ideas, and makes decisions based on the common purpose of the organization (Cox 1994).

The first step toward more inclusive decision making in organizations is to become aware of oneself as a "cultural self" and then to bring one's cultural beliefs, values, and assumptions into conscious awareness. The next step is to become aware of the cultural values, beliefs, and assumptions of others. The third step is to develop and apply a set of skills that allows group members from differing cultures to communicate effectively. An effective organizational decision is one in which the voices of all the cultures represented are heard and respected. Each cultural group still maintains the integrity of their own culture. It is in the "coming together" that a third culture is formed for the purpose of the management decision.

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