Part 6

Realizing New Realities
Encounters across cultures often create pell-mell moments of confusion, frustration and helplessness. Yet, such encounters also catapult us into areas where everything is experientially new, producing feelings of childlike wonderment. This cultural diversity, as we travel either voluntarily or because of a work assignment in other countries, challenges our notions of “sameness,” for what envelops us is “difference.” Different language(s), smells, foods, colors, sounds, weather, people, values, daily rhythms, and modes of behavior assault our senses. No longer do our patterns of behaviors work; we find ourselves in a dilemma that forces us to “swim” by continuously improvising and experimenting with workable routines, or “sink” by cocooning into old patterns of behavior that require others to be flexible, not us.

The impetus behind cultural diversity encounters is globalization. There is a growing realization that this reality is no longer optional as globalization fosters international economic and political development and, consequently, the need to reach out to others around the world. Personal networks are no longer local, but global. Much of the traditional diversity literature is national in scope, while cultural diversity is international in scope. The recognition of new realities propelled by cultural diversity increasingly brings awareness that the wellspring of our own humanity is empathic reciprocality which opens our hearts to a stream of sharing and receiving thus refreshing our own spirit.

This last of the six facets of diversity – realizing new realities – presents papers whose authors provide us with insights on cultural diversity. Several authors in the other five themes of diversity have touched upon this aspect of diversity. These three chapters, however, present several unique observations: (1) countries are not all the same – their histories shape and imbue them with highly unique characteristics; (2) leadership is more than a “standard one-fits-all” paradigm; and (3) exposure to different cultures brings new insight and growth.

Thor Indridason in National Institutions and the Fate of Diversity: What has become of Nordic Corporatism? presents a Scandinavian perspective on cultural diversity by challenging the globalization convergence thesis that
argues for the homogenization of socio-economic values and national characteristics among countries as they compete in the world’s marketplace. Indridason discusses the dynamics of social, political, and economic histories of three Scandinavian countries – Demark, Finland, and Iceland. He first explains that “Nordic corporatism” is, at one level, normally seen as the archetypical coordinated national economies similar to Japan or Germany in which close cooperation between business, labor and government institutions define governance and public policy development. Indridason then argues that the historical developments in Demark, Finland and Iceland have led to national characteristics that have produced unique approaches to the global competition. He concludes that Nordic corporatism in these countries refute rather than support the globalization thesis of convergence in which all national socio-economic characteristics have been homogenized into a common Nordic corporatism, leaching out the differences in national profiles.

Through a personal look at culture diversity from a leadership perspective, James Joseph introduces the notion of soft power as a model for international political leadership. In Soft Power in a World of Hard Power: Leadership as a Way of Being, he notes that to think of leadership as a way of being is to embrace the concept of soft power where persuasion and influence rather than coercion and economic muscle define the relationships with others. This way of being influences leaders who practice soft power to become agents of reconciliation who are healers and unifiers. James Joseph suggests that the practice of leadership is far more robust – leadership is situational, yet taps into the full reservoir of “human being-ness” at the mind, heart, and spiritual levels.

The final chapter by Marilyn Thomas entitled An American in Guangzhou, is highly personal. She describes her adventures in Guangzhou, China – a city she is visiting as Professor-in-Residence at Guangdong University of Business Studies. We experience southern China through her eyes. Her essay captures the essence of cultural diversity itself as lived experience. Her respect for her Chinese friends, students and the people she encounters in the market is authentic. Thomas uses the concept of “bao” which means “treasure” to describe her view of Chinese as little containers with treasures of big hearts. Each day the Chinese people she encountered shared some treasure with her that conveyed hospitality and warmth across the barrier of language.