How to enable your Asian employees to contribute to their full potential

Joy Chen
He must not have any ideas.

Not a leader.
What is culture?

- Approaches to problem-solving
- Attitudes toward authority
- Concepts of friendship
- Patterns of handling conflict
- Handling of emotions
- Notions of logic and validity
- Gestures of respect
- Group decision-making styles
- Prototypes of leadership
- Time orientation
- Concepts of self
- Displays of emotion
- Directness of communication
- Concepts of fairness
- Incentives to work

Artifacts
- Food
- Arts
- Customs
- Festivals

Source: Edward T. Hall

Learned and shared patterns

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Speaking = thinking?
Measuring the performance of diverse teams

- Polarizing
  - Leaders miss or ignore cultural differences
  - Cultural differences become an obstacle to performance

- Minimizing
  - Leaders recognize and leverage cultural differences

- Average performance

- Creating
  - Cultural differences become an asset to performance


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What minimizing looks like

A leader who...

- Genuinely respects all team members and aims to create inclusion
- Unaware of the cultural basis of own ideas and actions
- Is interested in cultural differences -- customs and festivals -- but doesn’t fully grasp the “differences that make a difference” to team performance
- Unintentionally enforces personal cultural norms, overshadowing other cultural expressions on the team
- As a result, team is culturally homogenous, even if it is demographically diverse
How minimizing locks in groupthink and impedes cultural understanding

**Cultural Native**

- **Authentic IS Effective**
  - Be your full authentic self

- **Repeated validation boosts confidence and belonging**

- **Continuous reinforcing of perspectives and influence**

**Cultural Non-Native**

- **Authentic OR Effective**
  - Fit in by giving in

- **Repeated sidelining erodes confidence and belonging**

- **Continuous suppressing of perspectives and influence**

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71% of Asian American adults are immigrants.
17% of all American adults are immigrants.

A barometer of team effectiveness:

Are your Asian team members speaking up?
5 steps to enable your Asian employees to contribute to their full potential
1. Equip leaders to lead effectively across all cultures
The continuum of multicultural effectiveness

- **Monocultural Mindset**
  - **DENIAL**
    - Misses Differences
  - **POLARIZATION**
    - Judges Differences
  - **MINIMIZATION**
    - De-emphasizes Differences
  - **ACCEPTANCE**
    - Deeply Appreciates Differences
  - **ADAPTATION**
    - Bridges Across Differences

- **Multicultural Mindset**

Source: Intercultural Development Inventory

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# The continuum of multicultural effectiveness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Denial</th>
<th>Polarization</th>
<th>Minimization (Native)</th>
<th>Minimization (Non-Native)</th>
<th>Acceptance</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Approach</strong></td>
<td>Disinterest, Avoidance</td>
<td>Fear/Anger</td>
<td>Tolerance</td>
<td>Survival</td>
<td>Curiosity</td>
<td>Flexibility</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Behavior</strong></td>
<td>Benign intent, misses differences</td>
<td>Uncritical toward own cultural practices, overly critical of others’</td>
<td>Assumes commonalities</td>
<td>Assimilate or be marginalized</td>
<td>Deeply appreciates differences, limited ability to adapt</td>
<td>Regularly shifts perspective and behavior to achieve goals, will make mistakes</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Individual Outcome</strong></td>
<td>Limited experience and skill for understanding differences</td>
<td>Tendency to overconfidence, damaged work relationships</td>
<td>Continuous reinforcing of authentic voice</td>
<td>Continuous marginalizing of authentic voice</td>
<td>(Similar to Minimization)</td>
<td>Enable all to be effective and authentic</td>
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<td><strong>Organizational Outcome</strong></td>
<td>Low diversity</td>
<td>Team fragmentation</td>
<td>Diminished productivity and innovation</td>
<td>(Similar to Minimization)</td>
<td>Innovation, agility, high performance</td>
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<td><strong>Development</strong></td>
<td>Recognize the influence of culture</td>
<td>Decrease judgment, locate commonalities</td>
<td>Grow cultural self-awareness and other-awareness</td>
<td>Adapt behaviors</td>
<td>Lead and guide others to bridge cultures</td>
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• Assess the current multicultural effectiveness of leadership teams

• Empower leaders with the cultural knowledge and skills to leverage cultural differences

• Enable leaders to effectively engage, motivate and mobilize colleagues and clients of every background
2. Equip Asians with professional development that meets their needs
1. Professional development was the #1 predictor of employee satisfaction and belonging.

2. Companies have consistently struggled to provide targeted professional development for Asian American employees.
Asian Leadership Accelerator Roadmap

**LEARNER TRAINING PROGRAM**

- Masterclass 1: Gain Clarity on the Unwritten Rules
- Masterclass 2: Unlock Your Inner Leader
- Masterclass 3: Connect Through Warmth and Trust
- Masterclass 4: Communicate With Influence
- Masterclass 5: Navigate Power Dynamics
- Masterclass 6: Pull in a Strategic Network of Allies
- Masterclass 7: Drive Meaningful Change
- Masterclass 8: Lead Inclusively
- Masterclass 9: Launch and Transform

Group Coaching: 

**SPONSOR/MANAGER TRAINING PROGRAM**

- CEO Kickoff Summit
- Exec Fireside Chat & Sponsor Action Meeting
- Exec Fireside Chat & Sponsor Action Meeting
- Exec Fireside Chat & Sponsor Action Meeting
- Exec Fireside Chat & Sponsor Action Meeting
- CIO Closing Summit

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Empower Asian employees to be fully effective and authentic

- With everyone
- Everywhere
3. Promote fair career pathways for Asian employees
### Traits associated with an ideal American leader:
- Assertive
- Dominant
- Charismatic

### Traits associated with an ideal American follower:
- Highly Competent
- Hard-Working
- Docile

#### Traits associated with Asians


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“Once Asian Americans are in leadership roles, they are often viewed as equally effective as their White American counterparts.”

Promote qualified Asians to leadership and Board roles
4.

Shift teams from demanding “culture fit” to embracing “culture add”
Common dynamics on minimizing teams

• Loudest voices “win”
• Others silenced and demotivated
Values for effective multicultural teams

- We each see things others don’t
- Every teammate is important
- Differences are opportunities for mutual learning
- Within team, no winners or losers
- We will succeed together
• Shift team processes to enable, value and integrate the full contributions of every member

• Establish more 1:1s for Asians with leaders; foster stronger emotional bonds for Asians with teammates

• Celebrate and reward multicultural champions
5.

Leverage Asian employees to power domestic and global market growth
Asians are America’s fastest-growing consumer and business group

% Change ‘00–’19

- White: 1%
- Black: 20%
- Hispanic: 70%
- Asian: 81%

• Tap Asian employees’ cultural/linguistic skills to access America’s fastest-growing business and consumer markets

• Leverage Asian employees’ networks to capture opportunities across global markets
### 5-Step Roadmap

**Enable your Asian employees to contribute to their full potential**

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<td><strong>Why</strong></td>
<td>• When leaders overlook cultural differences, these differences impede innovation and productivity</td>
<td>• Ineffective training can impede Asian career progression and reinforce stereotypes of Asians as poor leaders</td>
<td>• Stereotypes of Asians as poor leaders cause organizations to underpromote and underinvest in them</td>
<td>• Groups tend to favor those who fit established norms, thus marginalizing Asians, introverts and others with divergent views</td>
<td>• Asians are often relegated to back-office technical roles with limited leadership potential</td>
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<td>• Empower leaders with the cultural knowledge and skills to leverage cultural differences</td>
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<td>• Strategically appoint Asians to Board roles to gain access to new markets and fresh perspectives</td>
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In today’s rapidly shifting business arena, the ability to lead across cultural boundaries is more than a skill—it’s a strategic necessity. Modern leaders are called to motivate diverse team members and sell to clients from all backgrounds, often relying on digital communication alone.

The Multicultural Leadership Institute is your partner in this journey. We equip your leaders with a nuanced understanding of diverse business norms, the agility to transcend cultural boundaries, and the capacity to build lasting trust within your organization and with your clients.

Led by Joy Chen, former Deputy Mayor of Los Angeles and executive recruiter for Fortune 500 leadership, we combine global leadership expertise with innovative insights from across the social sciences.

Together, we navigate the complexities of domestic and global markets, transforming potential challenges into potent drivers of growth.
Let’s stay in conversation and community

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