CORPORATE TRIBALISM

AFRICAN AMERICAN & U.S. MAINSTREAM CULTURAL PATTERNS

DISCUSSION GROUP LEADER'S GUIDE

VERSION 0916

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LEADER'S DISCUSSION GUIDE PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES

The purpose of this guide is to prepare leaders to facilitate group discussions that reinforce and build on the KMA "Corporate Tribalism" cultural diversity web-based training series.

Discussion group leaders help participants increase self-awareness and analyze workplace interactions with the goal of creating new strategies for effective communication. The discussion group objectives are:
- Identify cultural patterns of difference
- Acquire greater self-awareness of communication and cultural styles
- Determine specific strategies that enable multi-cultural flexibility
- Identify opportunities for change that will lead to greater employee satisfaction, development and retention.

KMA Approach

KMA brings more than 20 years of field-tested experience to their training. Understanding the importance of culture and the role it plays in everyday interactions is central to the KMA approach.

Leveraging extensive research, KMA leads organizations and individuals through a unique training process using multimedia, group facilitation and discussion.

"Corporate Tribalism"

The name Corporate Tribalism, given to KMA's training programs and book, has its roots in cultural anthropology. It's the essence of what makes KMA diversity training unique. We look at what individuals share culturally by virtue of being members of the same group or "tribe." Tribal affiliations - social, ethnic, class - impact everything from the way we see the world and others, to how we see ourselves.

Corporations have traditionally been places where people are expected to conform and de-emphasize their unique characteristics – and yet, what we've learned and teach is that recognizing tribal and cultural differences is the key to unlocking our collective ability to create and excel.

TRAINING DESIGN

This leader's discussion guide is divided into three discussion content areas:
- Communication Styles
- Attitudes Toward Authority
- Understanding Behavior

These content sections mirror the construction of the web-based training series and are used to examine specific cultural background areas. In this guide we examine and compare a specific traditional culture and U.S. Mainstream culture. Video vignettes that appear in the web-based modules are used as part of the group format to launch discussions.

Group discussion questions are posed after each video to elicit participant feedback. Discussion group leaders are encouraged to lead participants to a desired conclusion by posing questions and facilitating answers in a directed manner. Potential answers and leader's tips are provided throughout this guide to help support desired conclusions and ensure consistent training.

To ensure your discussion objectives, it's important that every participant completes the corresponding web-based training modules prior to the group discussion and finishes their participant worksheets and guides.

LEADER INSTRUCTIONS AND KEYS

Throughout this leader's guide, you will find grey callout boxes and icons. The following key explains what each icon represents:

To-do checklist for leaders

Ideas and suggestions for leading the learning session

Show video vignette

Discussion item or group activity

PREPARATION CHECKLIST

Prior to leading the discussion, make sure you:

- ❑ Distribute an e-mail reminder for attendees
- ❑ Review the web-based learning module and preview the DVD vignettes
- ❑ Check classroom A/V equipment and hang posters

Materials you should have to lead the discussion group:

- ❑ Vignette DVD and DVD player
- ❑ Participant Discussion workbooks
- ❑ Posters for class or meeting room

SAMPLE E-MAIL REMINDER:

Subject line: Corporate Tribalism Discussion Group

To:

Subject: Corporate Tribalism Discussion Group

Signature: None

Dear participant:

Please join me for an informal discussion on the "Corporate Tribalism" web-based training you recently completed. Our conversation will focus on Communication Styles of Hispanic/Latino (insert appropriate culture and content section) and U.S. Mainstream cultures.

Be sure to bring your web-based learning worksheet and questions or topics you want to discuss. We will meet (insert date/location/timing).

I look forward to sharing ideas and continuing the conversation.

EFFECTIVE WAYS TO BEGIN DISCUSSIONS

Begin the meeting with a quick round of introductions (participant names and work functions). After establishing the ground rules, asking ice breaker questions will allow participants to speak up and become comfortable offering their ideas in the group forum.

GROUND RULES – "SPILLING THE MILK"

To support the training's interactive design, participants must feel comfortable sharing ideas in a non-threatening environment. It's important to review a number of ground rules:

- The discussion group setting is a "safe place" for difficult conversations.
- Participants are present because they want to learn.
- Creating change requires speaking your mind, disagreeing and even making mistakes.
- Experiences and   conversations remain in the group.
- Your organization values this change, and as a result, there are no career-threatening mistakes.

Keep in mind: Members from traditional cultural groups may want to identify issues collectively rather than individually. Allow small group breakouts to accommodate this preference where possible.

ICE BREAKERS

As you start discussions, ask participants to think back to the culture quiz they took during the introduction module of the web-based training series. Depending on the frequency with which your group meets, you may want to vary the suggested ice breaker questions offered here.

- How many discovered they were more traditional in their answers? How many were more mainstream? Did anyone have a mix of mainstream and traditional answers?
- Were participants surprised by the quiz findings?
- Did participants see a link between their quiz answers and the styles of the people who raised them?

Ice breaker note: Allow participants to share some of their personal views as you begin each meeting, but don't enlist a lengthy discussion at this point. Let participants know that the discussion is designed to review and further explore concepts and learning introduced in the web-based modules.

The ice breaker exercise transitions a discussion on addressing resistance. If needed, this should be done before discussing specific cultural archetypes.

ADDRESSING RESISTANCE

ISSUE: CULTURAL PATTERNS DON'T FIT MY EXPERIENCE

The primary issue of concern that many participants have with cultural patterns is when they don't fit their social or cultural experience as a member of that group. (See: Bell Curve poster)

Remind participants:

Archetypical patterns don't have to represent 100% of a group to be culturally representative of the group. However, even those group members who are not in the center of the bell group – outliers – recognize that the pattern is true for many members of their group.

ISSUE: CULTURAL ARCHETYPING SEEMS LIKE A FORM OF STEREOTYPING

Conventional social etiquette makes many feel uncomfortable talking about group differences. Because generalizations are often associated with stereotypes, over time people have learned to avoid talking about differences.

Some may assert that differences don't exist or that people should be ashamed or defensive about differences (otherwise why would we be reluctant to discuss them?). If the result is that people don't acknowledge and discuss differences, it leads to numerous problems as illustrated in the web-based learning modules.

Remind participants:

Archetypes differ significantly from stereotypes. (See: Stereotype vs. Archetype poster)

- Archetypes are non-judgmental, research-based generalizations with the intent to include, not exclude
- Archetypes are representative of insiders' views
- Archetypes do not have to apply to all group members to be true for a majority
- Archetypes enable constructive discussions about group differences

COMMUNICATION STYLES

AFRICAN AMERICAN & U.S. MAINSTREAM PATTERNS

ARCHETYPES

ARCHETYPES OF AFRICAN AMERICAN COMMUNICATION STYLES

Passionate advocacy

African American culture generates advocates - people who address issues with passion and conviction. The more strongly you believe in something, the more strongly you would argue in its favor. If you aren't passionate about what you believe, you may be seen as insincere.

Truth seeking

When African Americans speak forcefully to make a point, it's often driven from a strong desire to get to the truth of a situation: "Tell it like it is" or "Keep it real."

ARCHETYPES OF U.S. MAINSTREAM COMMUNICATION STYLES

Impartial representation

From the Mainstream perspective, a good way to maintain fairness and impartiality is by avoiding confrontations and arguments, because in mainstream culture, emotions are seen to work against reason not in support of it.

Peacekeeping

In mainstream culture, if a topic is likely to be volatile or controversial, it's better not to talk about it. Emotional displays and arguments create problems and are seen as divisive, potentially endangering relationships. "If you can' t say something nice, don't say anything at all."

After reviewing the archetypes, play the African American/U.S. Mainstream Communication Styles vignette: "Presenting the Plan." Ask participants to keep the archetypes in mind as they watch the video.

COMMUNICATION STYLES VIGNETTE #1

"Presenting The Plan"

Leah: I'm so glad we went back over this second design — with the changes we made last night, I'm confident that this is the plan. It costs a little more upfront, but the sustainable design is going to be worth it for the long run.

Matt: (has been nodding his head along with Leah): Yeah, I agree this plan is the way to go.
(Bill, a white male, pops his head into the room)

Bill: Hey guys, are you ready for the big presentation? I think the client's ready to pull the trigger today. Oh, but I meant to tell you, based on what Gregg told me yesterday — their budget's tight. I think we should only present your first design.

Matt: Oh? (Bill looks a little disappointed but says nothing more.)

Bill: Hey look we're too close to the finish line here let's make sure we get the deal signed today. I've got to run… I'll call you when we're ready for you (Bill leaves quickly)

Leah: Matt, what was that all about?! You agreed the second plan was the best, but you didn't say so to Bill.
Matt: You heard him. Gregg doesn't have the budget.

Leah: Well yes, up front, but you and I both know it's the better plan and over time it'll pay for itself. We at least owe it to the client to present it.

Matt: Maybe, I don't know…

Matt: Yeah, we'll be up in a minute. Listen Bill, Leah and I have been talking and we really want to present both plans… (pause while he listens) yeah… okay… no, I understand. Yeah, we want to close the deal, too….No,no that's not necessary, we can just show the one plan. Ok, ok, we're on our way. (Matt hangs up the phone.)

Leah: Well?

Matt: He's adamant, he doesn't want us to show the second plan. He's afraid the client will balk. Frankly, so am I.

Leah: You didn't even try to explain the benefits. We worked too hard on this. I can't believe you're not backing me! We had an understanding.

Matt: Now look, closing this deal is better than no deal.

Leah: I don't care if Gregg rejects the second plan, as long as we get a chance to present it. Give him the choice. Let him see how much thought we've put into this.

Matt: I'm sorry Leah, I've got to go with Bill on this. I hope you understand. Let's go.

GROUP DISCUSSION

Discussion management points:

- *The first set of analysis questions are designed to reinforce key information. Be quick to address and correct any misconceptions or inaccuracies that may undermine the learning of the group at large.*

- *If necessary, remind participants that cultural patterns/archetypes are based on research and are not stereotypes.*

- *If necessary, remind participants that patterns do not have to apply to everyone within a group to be representative of the group.*

OPENING POINT

To better understand what is going on in this scenario from a cultural perspective, we need to look at each person and examine how they are acting, what they are saying and why.

LET'S BEGIN BY EXAMINING THE SCENE FROM LEAH'S PERSPECTIVE

(Possible participant answers in italics)

What non-verbal cues did Leah give to Matt and what do they mean?

Leah's facial expressions and arm gestures show her disappointment and frustration with Matt.

What does Matt's silence signify to Leah?

From Leah's perspective, when Matt remains silent during Bill's explanation it signifies his consent with Bill's decision.

When Leah said to Matt, "What was that all about?" what expectation do you think she had of Matt and why?

Leah feels like she and Matt had an agreement to propose the second plan and Matt isn't holding up his end of the deal.

NEXT, LET'S LOOK AT THE SCENE FROM MATT'S PERSPECTIVE
(Possible participant answers in italics)

Why doesn't Matt speak up and disagree with Bill?

From Matt's perspective, not pushing back to disagree with Bill at that point doesn't necessarily mean he agrees with Bill – he's just listening.

Why doesn't Matt push harder for the better plan?

Matt, like Bill, is uncomfortable advocating for something that is likely to generate push back from the client. The stakes are too high and, like Bill, Matt would rather take the sure thing than add uncertainty to the situation. For both Matt and Bill, that feels risky.

Does Matt think he's reneging on his deal with Leah?

Matt doesn't see himself reneging on an agreement with Leah because he sees his agreement as conditional – not etched in stone. If factors of risk, cost or convenience come into play later, then he believes altering the plan is not only necessary, but also the right thing to do.
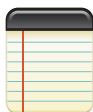
Next, invite participants to work through some better solutions using their multicultural knowledge and shared responsibility awareness.

REWORKING THE SCENE WITH MULTICULTURAL AWARENESS

How could Leah, Matt and Bill have approached this scenario differently understanding each other's cultural patterns?

One of the key reasons Matt and Leah are at odds has to do with their different tolerance of uncertainty and views on what constitutes "risk." Matt is afraid of going forward with an agenda in the face of potential (or real) client opposition. Leah is not.

MATT

Matt needs to understand that his agreement with Leah is seen by her as a promise or contract.

LEAH

Leah needs to understand that although Matt may agree with her – that agreement is contingent upon outside factors like perceived risk and cost.

BILL

Bill needs to acknowledge Leah with more eye contact as a simple courtesy. He might also benefit from knowing that the agreement that Leah and Matt had is, from Leah's perspective, more binding than he thinks it is.

STUMBLING BLOCKS

Even when we know what's required, we can still find it difficult to do.

What are the possibilities for Matt, Bill and Leah to change their understanding of what each one's behavior means and coming to grips with the deeper cultural issues around that?

What gets in the way of accommodating each other?

MATT AND BILL

A key factor for Matt and Bill is their relatively low tolerance of uncertainty and unwillingness to advocate for the better plan in the face of client opposition.

LEAH

Leah would need to better understand what an agreement means to Matt and Bill especially over where they, as opposed to her, draw the line around issues of risk.

WHITE MALE CULTURAL ISSUE

White men are sometimes taken aback at Matt's lack of support for Leah in pushing for the second plan, not because they disagree with the cultural archetype of white men at work that Matt's behavior reflects, as "conforming, risk averse and conflict avoidant." However, it doesn't align with how they see themselves, or would like to be seen, as individualistic, non-conformist, courageous even heroic risk-takers. This self-image is held up to young men growing up as the masculine ideal, sustained within the military, and regularly promoted in Hollywood in James Bond, Jason Bourne, Clint Eastwood movies, and most recently, by the leading character in the award winning movie, "The Hurt Locker."

> *Next, play the second African American - U.S. Mainstream communication video, "The Team Meeting." Ask participants to pay close attention to Leah and the other mainstream characters in the video, while keeping the African American and Mainstream communication archetypes in mind as they watch the vignette.*

COMMUNICATION STYLES VIGNETTE #2

"The Team Meeting"

(*The work team is gathered around a conference table. The manager begins the meeting.*)

Scott: All right, team. Let's get started with this week's report. Craig would you start?

Craig: Sure. Assuming you all got my e-mail, you know, I met with Jones-Hopkins, got the paperwork going for Erickson's and I've got two appointments to try to close the deal with Meyers.

Scott: Great, Leah how 'bout you?

Leah: I've been breakin' my back trying to get a meeting with Smith and Company and I just can't get my foot in the door.

Kris (jumps in): Did you try talking to Ralph? He has a colleague who just signed with them last month.

Leah: Okay, I'll give that a try. Iris, didn't you used to work with them?

Scott (before Iris can answer Scott interrupts): We can't go back through the old channels. We need to focus on going forward.

Leah (emphatically): I disagree! I think there could be an excellent opportunity there. In this economy I think we have to try every angle.

Craig (jumps in): I agree with Scott. We've got to move forward with the contacts we've established.

Leah: I still disagree, I think we should see what's possible.

Kris: Why don't we get Ralph in here before we make a final decision, and see what he has to say?

Scott: No, no, no, we're going to be fine. Iris, what do you have?

Iris: (long pause and then begins speaking): Ah, please refer to the report I've prepared.

GROUP DISCUSSION

NEXT, LET'S LOOK AT THE SCENE FROM LEAH'S PERSPECTIVE

(Possible participant answers in italics)

Why does Leah think it's not only okay to disagree, but that it's the right thing to do?

From a passionate advocacy standpoint, Leah believes as long as the point being debated is issue-oriented and she strongly believes in it – she should be able to disagree. She also doesn't see this action as "disturbing the peace" or undermining authority.

How does this fit the African American archetype for communication styles?

This fits the archetype in that often when African Americans passionately make a point, they are truth-seeking. If they didn't stand up for their position it would be seen as insincere or as an issue about which they don't care.

NOW THINK ABOUT SCOTT AND CRAIG, THE MAINSTREAM WHITE MALES IN THE SCENE, AND WHAT IS MOTIVATING THEIR BEHAVIOR

(Possible participant answers in italics)

Do Scott and Craig fit the mainstream archetype for communication and, if so, why?

Within the mainstream cultural perspective, people like others who agree with them. To "disagree" for U.S. mainstream people is being contrary ("disagreeable") and confrontational. This view is consistent with the conflict-avoidant orientation within U.S. Mainstream culture.

How do Scott and Craig view Leah's disagreement?

Scott and Craig feel Leah is being argumentative and difficult. They don't recognize her disagreement as helping reach a solution, but rather as divisive and problematic.

How is Scott's communication style consistent with mainstream white male patterns?

Scott demonstrates clearly that he is the one in charge. He dismisses Kris's attempt at peace-making and her suggestion to bring in another person's opinion - demonstrating his authority and control of the situation.

What motivates Craig's behavior?

Craig jumps in quickly and with authority to back up his manager, Scott. He also hopes in the process to squelch what he sees as ineffective dissension.

Next, invite participants to work through some better solutions using their multicultural knowledge and shared responsibility awareness.

REWORKING THE SCENE WITH MULTICULTURAL AWARENESS

What are the possibilities for Scott, Craig and Leah to change their understanding of what the different communication styles mean and come to grips with the deeper cultural issues around them?

> *To better understand one another, the meeting participants need to be aware of how differently they each interpret, "I disagree."*

SCOTT AND CRAIG

Scott and Craig (from the mainstream perspective) are predisposed to equate disagreement with confrontation or contrariness. They need to allow Leah to be forthright and candid without taking offense or shutting her or themselves down.

LEAH

For Leah, "I disagree" indicates cooperation and is a means to finding a better solution. However, if she recognized Craig and Scott's discomfort with her communication style – she could try to frame her comments by explaining that she is stating a point that she feels passionate about and is committed to finding a solution to the problem.

OVERALL

To better accommodate a variety of communication styles in the discussion, a turn-taking approach would help keep the dialogue balanced and even.

STUMBLING BLOCKS

Even when we know what's required, we can still find it difficult to do.

What are the possibilities for Scott, Craig and Leah to change their communication styles? What gets in the way of accommodating each other?

SCOTT AND CRAIG

Scott and Craig need to understand that Leah's more outspoken style does not mean she is not fully cooperative and committed to solving the problem at hand. They also need to control their resistant "knee-jerk" response to Leah when she says, "I disagree."

The difficult issue for Scott and Craig is developing a greater tolerance and respect for Leah's expressive style.

LEAH

Leah needs to understand how Scott and Craig are interpreting her behavior ("disagreeable," "uncooperative") and strategize accordingly.

For Leah, the difficult issue is having to suppress or tone down her more expressive style to accommodate the level which Craig and Scott can comfortably manage.

CROSS CULTURAL COMPLICATION

In some ways it would be easier for Craig and Scott to change than Leah because there are issues of group identity and affiliation in Leah's cultural style that are not there for Craig and Scott. For example, Leah's emotional expressiveness is tied to the image she has of herself as a black woman. If she were to suppress her expressiveness, other African Americans might see her as "acting white." Craig and Scott simply have cultural issues to deal with in developing a greater tolerance for emotionally expressive behavior. They don't have identity issues like Leah, because changes in their approach or behavior don't impact how they would see themselves, which is, as for white men generally in U.S. Mainstream corporate culture, simply as individuals.

AUTHOR'S NOTE: Our goal in developing multicultural flexibility is not only understanding what is at stake for individuals as they work to accommodate differences but also what each cultural group brings that is beneficial to the culture of the organization as a whole.

For example, we consider the African American cultural value of candor and forthrightness as value-added for many U.S. Mainstream organizations. This is because they often suffer from the absence of candor in their "don't make waves" or "go along to get along" mindset. In support of that goal, we consider developing skill sets to deal with a new level of forthrightness, such as learning to stay engaged while not being overwhelmed by another person's expressiveness. This is what we would suggest Craig and Scott learn to do.

All groups however, need to understand how their behavior is being interpreted and strategize accordingly. Knowing how your behavior is being misunderstood will change the way you see and approach the situation in the future. That, in and of itself, will go along way to promote multicultural flexibility.

Next, lead the group through open-ended questions. This is an opportunity to further explore the communication patterns and apply them to current situations in the workplace.

BUILDING SOLUTIONS

GROUP FEEDBACK QUESTIONS:

Take a quick pulse:

- In a show of hands, what puts you more at risk at work - accepting a done deal? Or, not pushing further for a better deal?
- Once more, in a show of hands, how many of you would think it's risky to openly disagree with a plan your boss proposes?

Call on individuals or address the group with these questions:

In mainstream companies, what characterizes a "team player" – agreeing or disagreeing?

How does that influence what it means to be "cooperative" from both a U.S. Mainstream and an African American perspective?

- From the mainstream perspective – it's going along with the program even if it may be one that you personally disagree with. Keeping in mind that white men currently reflect mainstream corporate culture more so than other groups, you can see how their risk-averse behavior is both developed and reinforced.

- From an African American perspective – disagreeing is not being uncooperative when the disagreement may lead to a better outcome.

- Being culturally assertive is a characteristic of African American ethnic culture stemming from West African (especially "Bantu") cultural traditions.

Can anyone think of a time when you disagreed with a colleague and how that was taken?

 Based on this discussion, are there things you might do differently going forward when you encounter disagreement at work?