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Part 3: Transcript

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Professor Martha Maznevski: Okay, welcome to the third session on leading globally. Today we're going to look at leading across differences. When we look at differences, it's interesting to compare the performance of diverse teams with the performance of homogenous teams, or teams where everybody is more or less the same. So, first of all, let's take homogenous teams. And when we look at how homogenous teams perform, teams that are the same gender, same country, same function and profession and so on, we generally see a range of performance, where some perform well, some perform not so well, and we know the difference. These are good communication, conflict resolution. These are groups that don't manage those so well. But, for the most part they tend to do what they're supposed to do and they achieve something.

Now, diverse teams, compared to homogenous teams, tend to perform either better or worse. So, they don't perform on the middle. And, in fact, on average more perform worse than better. Now, this is bad news for working across differences, because what we'd really like to see is this performance up here.

So, there are a couple of things that happen. These are teams that engage their differences and use them, as we'll talk about in a minute. These are teams that really destroy the differences. The most frequent response to diversity in teams, so when a group of people are sitting around the table and they notice how different they are, wow we come from different countries, different companies, different departments, different professions, they see how diverse they are, their first reaction is to actually suppress that diversity to say you know, we're not all that different, we're really all the same. And what that does is it moves them from here, on the left side, where they're afraid of being, into the middle. It's a better place to be, but there are two problems with it. One is that you're leaving money on the table; you're really missing out the opportunities that diversity has to offer. These are the teams that really outperform expectations, so you're missing out that opportunity that comes from globalisation. The other thing is that people whose differences are suppressed, so people who are not the same as the dominant norm of the team, but they have to act as if they are, become demotivated and frustrated, and they don't actually give everything that they can offer to the team. So, this is actually a very unstable place to be, and most teams that do this end up right back here again. So, the two messages from that: one, if you've got diversity you should use it, the second is that if you want high performance you should use the diversity you have to get there.

Now, let's take a look at the three things that highly diverse teams do that also perform well. Diverse teams need to do three things: we call them mapping, bridging and integrating. Mapping is really engaging the differences; it's literally drawing a picture of the similarities and differences in the team, and really understanding what implications they all have. There are several different dimensions that can be mapped. For example, you might want to map the differences in culture among different team members; and we'll talk more about culture tomorrow, when we're looking at cultural intelligence. You might want to map differences in personality, in function, in different business units; all of the different perspectives that people bring to the team that can be used with the team. I know this sounds a little bit silly or a little bit strange to sit down with your team and literally put on a piece of paper here are the names of the people in the team, and here are all the things that we're similar and different on, but we've learnt that teams that do that actually end up performing better, because they end up being able to use their whole selves in bringing every aspect of the team and the team members into the team, and using it for performance. So this mapping is understanding, drawing a picture of the different dimensions of diversity in the team, is the first step to using it to get high performance.

The second step is bridging. Bridging is communicating effectively, taking those differences into account, speaking and listening from the other person's point of view. There are three steps to bridging. The first part is approaching or preparing, really being motivated and wanting to understand other people from their own point of view. And it's amazing how often we're really interested in having

people understand us, but we forget a little bit about wanting to understand others from their own point of view. So, just that motivation is a big key. The second part is decentring, or putting yourself in the other person's place and speaking and listening from their point of view. For example, if you're a strong extrovert and you're used to speaking spontaneously, and you're working with an introvert who is more reflective, you might say, look, I know as an introvert you're not used to speaking as spontaneously, but it's okay to interrupt me at any time; I won't be offended. This is not decentring, because still the introvert will feel uncomfortable interrupting and speaking spontaneously. Real decentring is saying to the introvert let me give you the agenda ahead of time so that you have an opportunity to think it through before our meeting. The third part of bridging is re-centring, so finding commonalities, developing common norms, common definitions of the situation, common objectives. So mapping the differences, bridging across the differences.

And the third process is integrating, or using the differences to create new ideas to build on, to build participation, to resolve conflicts and to create innovation. Now, performance comes directly from integrating, so a team that integrates well will end up with high performance, they'll end up with high cost-cuttings, they'll develop new products, and they'll end up really exceeding expectations. However, bridging explains almost three quarters of the variance in integrating. In other words, if you get the bridging right integrating happens almost automatically. And if you don't get the bridging right the integrating doesn't happen at all. So, good teams really focus on the bridging part, and then let the integrating happen. At the same time, bridging doesn't happen unless you've got good maps. So, teams that perform really well, teams that are out at that right hand side of the graph, really focus on getting those maps right first, and then bridging effectively across the differences. Then they end up letting performance look after itself. In this way they are really using all of the resources that are in the team to address the complexity of the globalisation, and they're really developing leadership roles.

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