

## Interview with Dr Fritz Holsher



During this interview, Dr Fritz Holscher, Country Director for KnowledgeWorkx South Africa, provides a clear understanding of the value of Inter-Cultural Intelligence (ICI) as he describes case studies where he applied ICI concepts.

### Case Study 1: The Rainbow Nation

The republic of South Africa, a global entity in itself, has been in isolation for many years. The pride and appreciation that the White Afrikaner had for his own identity and culture was projected onto others, and combined with the motivation of fear for losing that identity, the Afrikaner designed the “social contract” that became known as Apartheid, splitting everybody and the country up to create cultural and physical spaces where people can live out their “God given right” to be themselves and do what they want.

The theory and the intent looked good, sound and fair, but the practical realities did not work out as planned, it led to discrimination, exclusion and even an exploitation that horrified the rest of the world looking for solutions to the fundamentals of human rights, which is believed to provide everyone a place and an opportunity to develop their full potential as individuals and as a nation.

One of the fundamental problems of the Apartheid ideology was that it was driven by fear. The intent was to share what they have, their land and wealth, but their sharing did not cross the boundary of sharing of “Self” and “Opportunity”. The Afrikaner could not share their being, their cultural identity; that they would protect with their lives.

Every one who challenged that “sacred space” would trigger the worst in them, their anger and wrath. The history of the Afrikaner is filled with incidences of protecting this sacred space, whether it was the Afrikaner language, Afrikaans, their land, their religious heritage, the color of their skin, and everything that relates to culture. This need to protect the

Afrikaner's culture was driven by three fundamental fears: the "Red Fear" of communism, with its atheist overtones, the "Black Fear" of the wave of Black Africa rolling down through the "Uhuru" of African Liberation to flood their dear land and deprive it from its proud European heritage, and thirdly the "Roman Fear" of the Catholics, since the Afrikaner had a predominantly Calvinist protestant religious orientation. These three fears fanned the fire of the Apartheid movement. When the Apartheid regime came to an end, the stage was set for an ugly civil war.

Various right wing Afrikaner groups were working furiously to prepare for war, to protect their cultural identity for the their children. But fortunately the nation had Nelson Mandela, on the one hand, and FW de Klerk and other South African leaders on the other who were prepared to take risk of leading South Africa out of the furnace of fear. In spite of many prophets of doom, that believed that a bloody Marxist revolution was inevitable, they turned the Marxist dialectics into intercultural dialogue and paved a way for a New South Africa.

These leaders agreed that we were not going to fight it out, but we will talk it out; a good African tradition called "Indaba" which means sitting around the fire and talk and talk and talk until every one has shared their wisdom and fears, waiting for the common good to emerge. It is the task of the Chief to harvest the common wisdom and ensure that it is put into practice. Indaba, together with another African principle of "Ubuntu" which means: "I am because we are," paved the way for an Inter-Culturally Intelligent solution.

Our leaders inspired the move away from the paradigm of fear to the paradigm of love! Instead of showing each other the fist they were showing each other an open hand. Nelson Mandela had the key of love in his hand and no other leader could turn this key, because he was the leader of the "aggressors" who wanted to take the Afrikaner's land, identity, language, national anthem and everything dear to the Afrikaner! "Is he a Christian?" many asked, "Which church does he belong to?" "Is he not a communist?" but with supernatural wisdom he rose above the occasion to offer his hand of friendship and openness to receive everything the Afrikaner could offer and allowed them to be anything they wanted to become, as long as it was not at the expense of other citizens in what has been called the "New South Africa". They could not and did not try to define this "New South Africa", but they showed the way of getting there; through dialogue and synergy which are the roots of Inter-Cultural Intelligence.

Like in the story of the "Wizard of Oz" everyone engaged in the journey on the "yellow brick road" to find the "Wizard" or the "New South Africa", but there are many who still have not made the switch from fear to love; who are still cultural critics instead of cultural learners. They are still fanning the fire of fear, providing "real evidence" that it did not work, they are quick to point out the incidences of reverse "Apartheid", many whites have been demoted or have lost their jobs, there are high levels of crime and an inefficient police force to deal with it. South Africa has one of the most advanced constitutions based on the principles of human rights, but a large portion of society is not used to, or socialized to operate within such a social contract or framework. There is abuse of human rights, but it is still better than a full blast civil war, which was doomed to destroy not only the social fabric, but also the economic and physical infrastructure of South Africa.

The emotional roots of fear are still present; though the structure and power play has changed and the vocabulary is politically correct... these things take time to uproot and only the next generation will reap the fruit if the current one can "hang in there!" Fear is a powerful emotion to unite people and nations, Mao Tse Tung said: "My enemy's enemy is my friend"... we share the same fear. We see how President George Bush uses this formula to bring unity amongst nations in the world today. Fear is such a strong emotion that unites people even to death, but on the other hand it is the greatest dividing force on planet earth. Unless we help people to understand and deal with their fear they can not become really culturally intelligent.

My vision for South Africa and the rest of the world is that we can move out of the fear paradigm to a paradigm of love. Love is not a warm and fuzzy feeling; it has a core competence, an intelligence that can be defined as the ability to deal with incompatibility. We do not really need love when we are faced with mere diversity, when people are just different from us in the way they greet each other, the way they eat, or any of a number of other different customs and behaviors. In the work place, this shows itself in different ways of building an industrial plant or managing people. For this we need the ability to understand, to anticipate and adapt to diverse cultural behavior.

Of course it is good to understand these differences, it shows respect and helps to smooth out the building of social and business relations, it is a good start towards developing Inter-Cultural Intelligence. But, understanding is no more the just the first step.

## **Case Study 2: Mining for Inter-Cultural Intelligence**

KnowledgeWorkx wants to lead their clients on the next steps "of the yellow brick road". Knowing the "do's and don'ts of another person's culture does not really make you culturally intelligent, it goes deeper than that. We need to help people learn to deal with diversity when diverse behaviors become incompatible, when we don't like each other, when other's thoughts and behaviors become threatening, when we engage with another enemy! The moment diversity becomes dangerous, when it starts to impact on my freedom and infringe on my ways of thinking, these are the times that we need the intelligence of love or what we want to call Inter-Cultural Intelligence.

We also call it synergy or a unity of opposites: we do not need synergy or dialogue when everyone is in agreement. Just like in South Africa, we needed a fundamental desire and commitment to make it work, not in spite of our differences, but more because of our differences. It is like getting a light to shine: causing the negative pole and positive pole to touch will cause sparks and blow the fuses, but when we are intelligent enough to put a globe between the two poles, we have a light! This is the intent of Inter-Cultural Intelligence, to get the light to shine on planet earth, this is the essence of love. This my personal dream and vision for South Africa and for the world; and for every client with whom I work, to find intelligent ways for the conflicting poles in organizations, in marriages and other personal relationships, to get together; to get the light to shine!

This may sound simplistic to hard core business people and engineers, but we have seen it work in many occasions over the years, resulting in real tangible results.

One such an occasion was in a mine in South Africa where there was tremendous conflict between management and the unions at the time of the transition from "Apartheid" South Africa to the "New South Africa".

The management was mainly white Afrikaner men and the workers African men. The differences were much deeper than the typical wage and working conditions disputes. The liberation struggle was in full swing, white managers were not only regarded as "racists" but also "capitalists" exploiting the have not's; African workers and unionists were regarded as Communists, fanning the Afrikaner fear. This came on top of the normal cultural differences about time management, work ethics, individualism vs. communalisms (injury to one is injury to all!)

One of the mining shafts was ready to close down, because it was responsible for one and a half million Rand loss per month. It sounded like an easy business decision to make, but given the context it was quite a challenge because a strike could cost them R20 million a day in lost production, if the cultural norm of "injury to one is injury to all" were applied. All the normal routes of negotiations were exhausted and the Regional GM said to me: "I don't believe in this dialogue and synergy, but I have no options left. The shareholders are putting pressure on us, because our figures don't look so good."

Given the mining culture I knew the tremendous power of a Regional GM, and I would not engage in this process unless I had his full support, which he pledged. We went through the process of applying Inter-Cultural Intelligence and dialogue. We got the unions and management to start to talk and they hammered out a plan together. The challenge for us and management was to ensure that the plan was "translated" into terms that the Unions could understand and relate to given their cultural context, and not a plan dictated by management in complicated financial terms and technical engineering jargon.

The exercise took about 6 weeks, far too much for an impatient mine manager's nerves, but in three months time the mining shaft stood at R3 million profit. The shareholders were happy again and the Unions were praised by their members by ensuring that there no retrenchments...and the light shines again at the mine.

### **Case Study 3: Community Development**

The principles of Inter-Cultural Intelligence, synergy and dialogue were also applied in the area of community development. The case studies were recorded in full in a research document for the World Bank. Many community development projects found themselves in troubled water because of misalignment between the sub-cultures of donor countries, receiving governments and the local community. It is normally left to an NGO to deliver the projects to the benefit of all. We did work for the Corporate Social Investment (CSI) department of a large corporate business, and developed the concept of a "Government-Community -Business tripartite alliance." Through the success of the stakeholder alignment through synergy and dialogue, the CSI fund was able to leverage funds for school building projects to the amount of R100 million through an initial investment of one million Rand.

## Case Study 4: Homo Dialogicus

In my early days when I mined university libraries for answers to the social problems of human beings on planet earth, I became so pre-occupied with the concept of dialogue that I even called human beings Homo Dialogicus instead of Homo Sapiens. I firmly believed, and made a theoretical and scientific case that if human beings lose the existential ability to have dialogue with each other and their world, they become alienated from their true being. True human nature is expressed and restored through synergy and existential dialogue which is much more than mere talking things out. Existential dialogue is talking with the heart, mind and spirit.

It is like being born again, when we again take the risk that the sperm took to share all his chromosomes with the little egg cell in the mother's womb! This act of sharing everything he had with her was the process that helped them both to survive and to become more than they were before! They could grow from their microscopic existence to become a beautiful human being. Imagine what could happen with the human race if we could really become Inter-Culturally Intelligent, if we could stop fighting because of our fear of losing our stuff and our identity!

In one of my assignments as a consultant in South Africa I had to facilitate the return of many white teachers, school inspectors and principals of schools. I remember a very scary occasion that still sends shivers through my spine when I think of it. At this particular College of Education, the Rector was threatened and told by the students not to come to the College. He was regarded as a racist and became the pivotal token for attack against the "racist regime" in South Africa. It was already July-August, very little education was taking place; students were agitated because, especially white lecturers did not want to give lectures if the Rector was not on campus. The Student Representative Council believed in "Liberation before Education;" they were under pressure from their support base who did not want to sacrifice a study year which meant postponement of employment, etc. The situation was highly volatile and had reached the point of explosion when we were called to come and apply the principles of synergy and dialogue.

The negotiations got to a point where the students put their final demands on the table and were awaiting a response from the Department of Education and Training. It was an impasse, the students were prepared to "sacrifice" a lot of their previous demands, but would not budge on the return of the Rector.

We got together as the consultant team with the senior executives of the DET, and put some of the best minds in the country together to work out a speech that would convince the students that the Rector must come back before education could take place. The speech was close to perfection in terms of negotiation principles, political sensitivities, psychological and sociological theory and almost everything else! The Regional Director would deliver it, and the Vice Rector who had still credibility with the students, and I would go with him for moral support.

The hall was packed to capacity, somehow there was only one door open and that was the main front door where we came in, we had to walk through the crowd to the stage from

where the RD would address the students. As we entered the hall a sudden silence, pregnant with hostility and violence came over the crowd and very softly they started to sing an Afrikaans folk song, translated as "Oh! The donkey is a wonderful thing...."

The RD whispered to me... "I am not going to give that speech, you must take the stage!" I was doomed; I did not prepare myself to deliver this baby or rather perform this abortion! During those years many schools and colleges were burned down in the violence, people were often "necklaced"- with an old motorcar tire filled with petrol round their necks and then set on fire. I could not refuse my client's request, after all I was paid to be there.

In the few minutes from the back of the hall as I was struggling to get my stress levels under control and not to even think about what to say, I just realized that the perfect speech was out of the window. I was introduced by the vice rector as the facilitator and had to face the crowd of about 600 students. They started to ask all sorts of funny questions as only students could do, each one trying to outperform the other with witty questions at the expense of the anxious facilitator on the stage. I knew I would really score points with my client if I could apply my professional facilitation skills to get the Rector back, and that was exactly what I tried. But this was going against what the small little voice said deep inside me. To cut a long story short after a while they stopped the witty remarks and the SRC chairman shouted with a loud voice, "Comrades you see, he is just another white racist, he is not part of the liberation struggle."

I can not remember the rest of his speech, I just remember looking for an escape route, realizing that there was not much hope to escape, for a moment I saw my funeral, another Afrikaner hero, giving his life for.....what? The energy was as explosive as it could become, the girls were starting to shout their typical war cries and I knew that if this got out of control we had had it!

When he finished his speech I put my hand up and asked for silence to say something. I still did not know what I should say, I just realized this was no longer the time for academic jargon and professional tricks, it was a moment of truth for all of us. For moments like these one can not prepare, your knowledge fades away, all your trimmings and titles are null and void! I had only myself to share, to be as honest as I could be! And that was exactly what I did. On the spur of the moment, almost without thinking, I took off my jacket, threw it on the chair next to me and said, "There is the consultant, here am I, Fritz Holscher. I agree with you that my people are the authors of apartheid, causing you to suffer. I feel sorry for all the misery that it brought and I understand your anger, but there is one thing I can not agree with and that is that I am not part of the liberation struggle. I am and so many of my people, we need to be liberated from racism, from fear.....and ....and....."

I just shared my heart and vulnerability; I threw myself in their hands and asked their understanding and support for our part of the liberation struggle, there was no pretence, just a moment of fearless truth. Here I am. I have taken off my clothes, you see me as I am! As I talked, the mood started to change and they roared "Viva Comrade Fritz, Viva!"

The light shone, the opposites found a moment of synchronicity, love drove away the fear. I walked out a free man! We did not resolve the issue of the Rector at that time, more

important existential issues were on the table, for a moment of true liberation came for me.

That afternoon I went to visit the Rector, a brilliant and well educated man, at his home to give a report back of the proceedings. He told me that he already heard the news and that there was still no agreement that he could return to the College. He said that he felt I had failed him and did not live up to my assignment; he would prefer if I no longer rendered consulting services to the College....he would inform the head office accordingly.

I was fired! I lost my assignment, but somehow I did not care, money could not pay for this victory over myself and fear! Somehow I did not feel I had failed, the scales tipped in the right direction for me! I said goodbye to him, he went on his journey and I went on mine. Somehow I felt that the two journeys were more than merely our individual journeys, it was a major junction for the nation. We took different roads, I never met with him again.....

When I look back at this experience, I realize I was in the examination hall of the "University of Hard Knocks". It is relative easy to write about dialogue and synergy, to dig up all the theories and read the books, but to live through the experience, to take decisions where your only reference point is yourself and God, takes another kind of intelligence, and perhaps these are the degrees that are of real value on planet earth.

The lesson I learned is that there is a space where differences and conflicts are not eliminated but transcended, it is a space of being and higher meaning, a space where fear has not left its footprints. It is an effortless space where we do not try to accommodate each other, nor try to compromise and negotiate; it is a space where the FIFO (Fit In or Fly Of) principle is not applied. It is a space where both parties are fulfilled not in spite of, but because of our differences.

We were able to develop the whole methodology of dialogue which we have applied with tremendous success. One of the keys to Inter-Cultural Intelligence is not to agree but to understand....many people think that if you understand someone you must agree with them.

#### Mark Twain Revisited

KnowledgeWorkx has provided a very good basis for the work that I have been doing for the last 20 years. To apply the concept of dialogue and synergy (and I define synergy as a unity of opposites) to the cultural world. The research that they have done fits well with what I am doing and that is my passion, to find a new way to develop the ability to deal with incompatibility. One plus one equals three. My vision is to help develop skills in people to be Inter-Culturally Intelligent – to get the light to shine by getting the positives and negatives to work together. Fear destroys that light, and we have wars. To build a bridge between fear and love (synergy), there has to be justice.

We have a process that we follow called "stakeholder alignment". When a company has a tremendous conflict, they cannot grow. We identify the stakeholders, those who have an interest in the company, and see the contribution that they make to the company. Then we talk to the leaders and see where we can get an alignment from them and we try to move

into the synergy paradigm. The next step is to identify the issues. Once your stakeholders realize that they don't need to act out of fear, then you go to the fourth step which is dialogue. We bring them together and create a common vision, which helps them find purpose, and anger is dissolved as they get into the synergy paradigm. Once they are able to talk together, they can work together.

We keep a close eye and monitor the progress. I have used this six -step model with tremendous success, all over the world. In a diverse workforce there are people who have different styles and concepts about many things. You can have rules but they don't necessarily solve the problems. Back in South Africa, we have a new constitution, and it is one of the most sophisticated human rights constitutions in the world, but it's not solving the problem. People haven't emotionally gotten out of the paradigm of fear. You need to first address the problem on an emotional and spiritual level, and only then will your intellect start to kick in. But if we start with the intellect and believe the moment we've got all the correct policies together, everything will fall into place, it is a mistake.

There are many companies that ignore the diversity. They don't really bring the opposites together and get the light to shine. The value for business is untapped potential if they ignore this. These people work in the company just because they have skills, but they don't ever bring their heart into the business. But for those who have brought the heart of the people into the business, a great potential is unlocked. It's the difference between talent and competence. Competence is something that is acquired and talent is something inbuilt. And when you get to that level to allow people to share, you create scope in the context where people give much more than they did before, they give of their talents.

Here is an illustration that we use in Inter-Cultural Intelligence. If there is a triangle and a circle and you try and make the two shapes fit together, you will get some overlap, but basically it is, what we call the "FIFO" principle, i.e. "fit in or fly off"... but instead of that we encourage the creation of a new shape altogether – a cone! For this, you need to go into the third dimension, one in which everyone brings their full potential into the company.

My passion is in business and in finding the tremendous new potential that develops and emerges. But you see, it is not that I can shine on my own, the secret of this new approach is interesting, if you look at the love concept. It is in embracing your opposite. And that light can only shine when we embrace each other. Mark Twain said that east is east and west is west and never the two shall meet. Though very sincere, he was very wrong. East and West have to meet, but we have to meet in the third dimension.

**Copyright KnowledgeWorkx @2007**