



Understanding W.E.I.R.D.* Cultures: Experiential Activities for Reducing Participant and Institutional Bias

Presenters: Jon DeVries and Alex Cleburg, MA

****Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic***

WEIRD countries have unique sets of those norms and values. Through a set of both in-person and virtual activities participants will be able to experience and reflect upon their own immediate reactions to WEIRD values. We will explore what these values are, and how they perpetuate biases in our institutions. Next, we will examine the ramifications they may have on our institutional effectiveness and outcomes. Finally, we will analyze and discuss how to effect change in our organizations to attain better outcomes. While we will use the WEIRD cultures model to frame our session, we will also examine ways our activities are useful for understanding bias founded on any culture's values and norms.

In this highly experiential workshop, we will explore how culturally specific values become universal and invisible. This invisibility can sabotage an organization's ability to successfully interact with diverse groups within their culture and bridge across cultures. Unless we can unmask and address these biases, our institutions will continue to reinforce the same behaviors, entering an unending cycle of repeated outcomes. Understanding individual and organizational bias can increase our effectiveness connecting across differences. Whether our activities are new for you or are done in a new way that helps develop new insights into facilitating them in unique ways, participants should expect to be creatively, experientially, and reflectively engaged. Our workshop model also includes train the trainer discussions for application of these tools to participants' professional and personal work/lives. In addition, as more trainings are moving to only online, we will also discuss ways in which our activities can be adapted to virtual environments.

Participants will be able to:

- Describe the values common to the W.E.I.R.D. cultures, and how those values lead to creating and reinforcing biases in our institutions
- Experience activities designed to unmask the underlying biases discussed in the W.E.I.R.D. framework
- Frame values as WEIRD instead of universal to better include those visiting the West or interacting within institutions of the dominant culture
- Apply experiential methods to unmask hidden cultural values



About the Presenters



Jon DeVries is an intercultural trainer and consultant specializing in Intercultural Competence Development, Leadership Development, Team Building and Training Design with a background in Experiential Education and Adult Learning Theories. Jon held positions at the University of Minnesota, including Short-Term and Custom Programs Director in the International Student and Scholar Services Office. He has worked with large and small businesses, K-12 and higher education institutions, government agencies and non-profit organizations. Jon enjoys leading student travel and service-learning groups abroad and was a faculty member and Intercultural Learning Circle Coordinator aboard the inaugural semester-long voyage of *The ScholarShip*. He is one of the founders and a planning board member of SIETAR-Minnesota where he lives with his wife Basma and their two boys. He is also a Music Teacher through the nationally accredited Music Together Program.



Alexander Cleberg, MA, is an intercultural trainer at the University of Minnesota. By carefully listening to the needs of students, staff and faculty he has developed material grounded in the practical experiences of campus community members. He has actively developed immigrant entrepreneurs in the United States for 19 years and researched the intercultural competencies of immigrant entrepreneurs in the Twin Cities of Minnesota. He is a Qualified Administrator for the Intercultural Development Inventory and has been a fellow and faculty member at the Summer Institute for Intercultural Communication. He has taught English in Tokyo, worked with refugees and immigrants from Somalia, Ethiopia, Togo and Honduras for a 3-year Department of Labor project, led an educational program for post-tsunami relief efforts in Moratuwa, Sri Lanka, consulted engineers in Pilsen, Czech Republic and presented with the Rotary International in both Kampala, Uganda and Addis Abba, Ethiopia. Alex uses his experience as an improvisational actor and storyteller to shape his intercultural development projects. He has been a teacher at the Brave New Workshop in Minneapolis and founded a mashup hip-hop/improv troupe which performed at the Del Close Improv festival in New York City.