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Driven by Difference

How Great Companies Fuel Innovation Through Diversity

THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

Today's workforce is more diverse than ever before. But despite new perspectives and talents, the promise of increased innovation rarely materializes. Why are so few businesses seeing results?

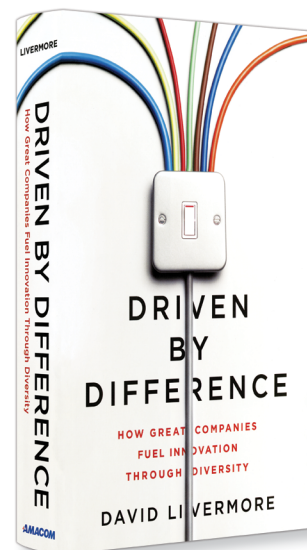
Studies show that diverse teams are more creative than homogenous ones — but only when they are managed effectively. The secret is to minimize conflict while maximizing the informational diversity found in varied values and experiences. To do this, both leaders and team members need a high level of cultural intelligence (CQ).

Drawing on success stories from groundbreaking companies, *Driven by Difference* identifies the management practices necessary to guide multicultural teams to innovation, including how to create an optimal environment, build trust, fuse differing perspectives, align goals and expectations, generate fresh ideas, consider the various audiences when selecting and selling an idea, and design and test for different users.

Cultural differences can lead to gridlock, or they can catalyze innovation and growth. *Driven by Difference* offers a research-based plan to turn diversity's potential into economic reality.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- The meaning of cultural intelligence (CQ) and the benefits of using it.
- To adopt new perspectives and reveal assumptions in your products and organization.
- The five steps for creating the best climate for culturally intelligent innovation.
- The additional five steps of the *process* of innovating with cultural intelligence.



by David Livermore

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THE COMPLETE SUMMARY: DRIVEN BY DIFFERENCE

by David Livermore

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Diversity Is

Today, 36 percent of the U.S. workforce is made up of people of color, and by 2040, there will be no U.S. ethnic or racial majority. That reality is coming even more quickly to Canada. The shift is happening in more traditionally homogenous places like Denmark and Sweden as well. Similar trends exist most everywhere. And when you add the diversity of perspectives that come from one's gender, socioeconomic background, sexual orientation, profession, faith and much more, indeed, "Diversity is."

What ultimately matters is not the source of diversity but the different values and perspectives that emerge from it. The differences that most strongly influence innovation are the varied approaches for communicating, planning and executing tasks. How do you align the values, expectations and work styles of four generations, dozens of nationalities and endless subcultures toward a universal vision and strategy for the organization?

Cultural intelligence is what makes the difference. The cultural intelligence of the individuals on a diverse team determines whether the team's diversity promotes or deters innovation. Cultural intelligence, or CQ, is the capability to relate and work effectively in culturally diverse situations. Research on cultural intelligence finds that the culturally intelligent have developed skills in four capabilities:

1. CQ Drive (Motivation): Having the interest, confidence and drive to adapt cross-culturally.
2. CQ Knowledge (Cognition): Understanding intercultural norms and differences.
3. CQ Strategy (Metacognition): Making sense of culturally diverse experiences and planning accordingly.

4. CQ Action (Behavioral): Changing verbal and nonverbal actions appropriately when interacting cross-culturally.

Fortune 500 companies expect the greatest revenue streams over the next decade to come from emerging markets, and top universities are recruiting students from around the world and from groups previously underrepresented on their campuses. The convergence of consumer diversity with workplace diversity is the nexus of the greatest challenges and opportunities for a culturally intelligent approach to innovation. ●

PART I: THE CLIMATE FOR CULTURALLY INTELLIGENT INNOVATION

The essential elements for building a climate that promotes culturally intelligent innovation include attention, perspective-taking, focus, space and trust. ●

The Power of Attention

The first critical element is paying attention to diversity and innovation. You innovate to the degree you *consciously* think about innovation. This is the power of attention. Your experience of any situation or event largely depends upon what you choose to pay attention to or ignore.

Why Are Some More Innovative Than Others?

The organizational culture where you work is the biggest factor for whether you successfully innovate. Three characteristics are consistently found in organizational cultures that foster innovation regardless of the location: a willingness to cannibalize assets, a future orientation and a tolerance for risk.



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Most companies and institutions work hard to protect whatever provides their greatest profits. But an organizational culture that consciously promotes a willingness to sacrifice current profit-generating activities is an important part of conscious innovation.

Second, a future orientation primes people in the company to realize the limitations of current technology and systems, and they more readily consider the emergence of a new generation of technology that may become dominant in the future. Finally, innovative organizational cultures create a consciousness in people that views failure as an accepted, important part of the innovation process. They find concrete ways to demonstrate safety around the reality that not all innovations will lead to a guaranteed stream of profits.

How to Pay Attention to Innovation

Maintaining and developing a climate of culturally intelligent innovation among a diverse team requires a deliberate, ongoing effort. Here are a few practices that can help.

Prime for culturally intelligent innovation. The most important way to prime for culturally intelligent innovation is for the leadership to surround themselves with a diversity of perspectives, utilizing that breadth to drive their own innovative approaches. Innovation needs to be built into every person's role and across all the systems and processes for product development and implementation. Images, signs, town hall meetings and written messaging need to be used to keep everyone's attention on the customers of tomorrow.

Become conscious of blind spots. Consider which groups of people you find most difficult to trust. How might that difficulty connect to a deeply rooted bias? And how might it be closing you off from innovative breakthroughs?

Train yourself (and others) to think differently. Make a habit of forcing yourself out of autopilot. Work from a different space. Don't always run your meetings the same way or in the same place. When your team comes up with a solution, stop and ask each other whether this is the best option or whether a third alternative is worth exploring. ●

The Power of the Empty Chair: Perspective Taking

Jeff Bezos, founder and CEO of Amazon, frequently leaves one open seat at the company's most important

meetings. It's there to remind executives and managers of the most important person in the room — the customer. Add an empty chair to *your* most important meetings, but don't stop at that. Learn how to take on the perspective of a diversity of users, known as *perspective taking*.

Perspective taking is “the capability to step outside [our] own experience and imagine the emotions, perceptions and motivations of another.” It begins with realizing that two individuals can be presented with the exact same information and arrive at radically different interpretations.

Once you learn to accurately take the perspective of others, you have a whole new ability to design products and services in a way that truly brings solutions. And with a diverse team, you have a built-in mechanism for taking on the perspective of your users. This requires not only learning how to read individuals one at a time but also learning how to see the tendencies, patterns, motivations and connections across a particular cultural group.

The greatest challenges of perspective taking lie not so much in how we deal with entirely erroneous perceptions but how we deal with different, legitimate views and experiences that are each a part of the whole.

The goal is not for all of us to abandon the social group and identity with which we were reared. Neither should we pretend we don't have legitimate self-interests. We want to transcend our existing perspectives without leaving them fully behind.

How to Improve Perspective Taking

There are several practices that can help you make perspective taking a regular part of your innovation process.

Observing. Most innovators are intense observers. They observe people in a different environment and look for how they solved problems. They actively watch people as they use products. They observe people in real situations. They look for what's surprising.

Listening. Effective listening to gain the perspectives of others means intentionally hearing a customer's pain points and desires, and creatively getting them to share things that will enlighten how you go about the innovation process. How do customers order and purchase your product? Is there a way to make that easier and less costly? How do they receive it? What frustrations do they have?

Simulating the user's experience. If you can't actually sit in the home of a customer, like A. G. Lafley from P&G does, the empty-chair strategy can be used by assigning someone to take on the perspective of a particular demographic and to role-play in the meeting, as if he were someone from that cultural background.

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Checking for accuracy. Perspective taking relies on your ability to consider other people's perspective accurately. If you don't really know what it's like to be poor, in pain or at the bottom of the corporate ladder, then the mental gymnastics of putting yourself in someone else's shoes isn't going to improve your innovation. Beware of confirmation bias, the tendency to look for and favor information that confirms what you already thought. ●

The Power of 90 Minutes: Focus

Distraction is one of the biggest roadblocks to innovation. And the more globally dispersed your team, the greater the potential for distraction. From managing countless religious and national holidays to dealing with round-the-clock virtual team meetings, the interruptions and ubiquitous ping of technology, speed and multitasking are often the enemies of culturally intelligent innovation. As a result, it's absolutely essential that we learn how to focus. Focus begins with self-control, and self-control requires focus. It's a symbiotic relationship that needs patience.

Self-control, patience and focus can be taught to anyone, but don't overdo it. Start with a 90-minute block, with no interruptions allowed. And then change tasks. The power of focus for developing truly innovative solutions often rests in simply distracting ourselves from distractions.

How to Increase Focus

Here are a few ways to get started as you build focus into your climate for culturally intelligent innovation.

- Do creative work first. Each task drains your energy and lowers your focus. Start with the tasks that require a greater measure of creativity and concentration and then move to the easier work.

Get out of the office. When you need to tackle a creative task, change environments. Simply being in a different surrounding can stimulate the experiential circuits of the brain.

- Mind your breath. Paying attention to breathing is a way of automatically putting life back into perspective by putting focus on our most essential function.
- Write. Writing encourages you to create a story line and structure that helps you make sense of what has happened and work toward a solution.
- Set three priorities. What three priorities are you focused on this week? If you can't list them right off, that's a red flag.

The more personalities and cultures you have working together on an innovative project, the easier it is to lose focus. But when a diversity of perspectives and styles

coalesce around a shared objective, and each individual does the hard work of keeping focused on achieving that objective, the colorful solutions that result are well worth the effort. ●

The Power of Trees: Space

Few companies have spent as much time considering the power of the work space as Google. Its open office environment, on-site massages, all-you-can-eat gourmet kitchens and flexible work spaces have been featured in many discussions about how the workplace environment influences innovation and productivity.

Culturally intelligent innovation must account for the power of space. The work space influences the generation of ideas, the building of trust and the overall quality of life for individuals and teams as a whole.

Teams that meet in spaces with natural light report a more positive team experience than those who work together in windowless spaces. And people who look out at natural environments from the workplace feel less pressured and more satisfied with their jobs and suffer from fewer ailments such as headaches. Nature, light, temperature and noise have a consistent impact upon how diverse teams engage in productivity. These are universals that need to be factored into any space in order to most effectively leverage the potential of diversity for driving innovation.

Nature. The soothing influence of rippling water, drifting clouds, rolling meadows, trees, rocks and flowers is a refreshing contrast to the constant ping of email, text messages and sitting through PowerPoint presentations. Being absorbed in nature increases our flow.

Light. The best type of light to promote culturally intelligent innovation is natural light. Both the central nervous system and the neuroendocrine hormonal system are influenced by the powerful stimulus of light. Natural light also shapes your level of focus. It has a direct impact on productivity and your overall well-being, regardless of your cultural background.

Temperature. Cold is a stimulant and heat is a sedative. It's pretty simple: To decrease your body's heat production, you have to stop activity. To get warm, you need to move. The temperature in a room influences the way people are able to engage. A team member's complaint about the meeting room being too hot or cold can seem like a petty concern. But these kinds of discomforts are the very distractions that impede optimum performance when we're trying to nurture culturally intelligent innovation.

Noise. The degree to which sound acts as a stimulant or a distraction differs among individuals. Some come up

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with their most creative ideas with some music playing in the background, while others are distracted by that. But the universal principle is to stop and consider how sound and noise shape the way different people engage in collaborative work. Quieter spaces typically produce higher productivity, but you have to find just the right degree of quiet. Too much quiet can be a sedative.

How to Use the Power of Space

What's a culturally intelligent way of utilizing the power of space to support the innovative process?

Determine need for more stimulation or less. This includes awareness of the kind of space that best supports creative thinking for you, which may vary according to your current flow, mood and the project at hand. As you engage in creative work, look at the task, and consider when you need complete silence to focus and when working from a more active environment would help you better accomplish your goal.

Create the space you need. Set up your space intentionally. Eliminate distractions, arrange for exposure to natural light, allow for the physical breaks needed, and pay attention to the temperature and how it influences the way people engage.

Allow flexibility. Understand the diversity of preferences among the people on your team. Look for the space that works best for your team, and empower individuals to take control of making the space most conducive for them.

Take control of the innovative process by managing your space. Beware of the differences among your team, and leverage the universal power of light and nature. ●

The Power of Trust

Innovation involves risk, both for organizations and their employees. And it's unlikely individuals will make themselves susceptible to risk unless there's a climate of trust. When individuals feel trusted, they know they can take the risks required to pursue innovative projects. Failure is expected, and the key is whether bold attempts are made and lessons learned.

Trust means different things to different cultures. It comes down to whether you believe somebody is dependable. It's a subjective evaluation, but it's crucial for innovation to occur. The very same behavior can elicit trust for one individual and erode it for someone else, depending upon how the behavior is interpreted. We implicitly trust people like ourselves. We're all biased. Some implicit favoritism is inevitable. But acting upon

that bias is not. We can consciously learn to trust people who differ from us and help others do the same.

What goes into calculating trust? Five factors consistently emerge when calculating trust: likability, competency, intentions, reliability and reputation. The degree to which these factors influence whether you trust someone depends upon the task involved, your personality and your culture.

How to Build Trust on a Diverse Team

Global leaders need to demonstrate trust-building capabilities in two ways. First, they need to gain trust from members from different cultural backgrounds. Second, global leaders need to build trust among team members. The culture and personality of individuals on a team influences how the participants calculate trust according to the five trust factors, so culturally intelligent strategies are needed. Here are a few leading practices.

Leverage the power of in-group bias. Work on developing some in-group identity as quickly as possible. This has to be done very carefully, or it erodes cultural intelligence and promotes an unhealthy "us versus them" mentality. But once you create a sense that you're an in-group together, it allows you to have greater authority in challenging some of the potential blind spots of the group, rather than doing so as a perceived outsider.

Build team competence. Find ways to demonstrate the value of the different skills and perspectives represented by your team members. Give some short-term manageable goals that are possible to achieve only with the shared competencies on the team, and then create a workflow that reflects the respective competencies and expertise among team members.

Develop team results. Create some small wins early on and allow the team to experience successes that they couldn't have had without being together.

Create psychological safety. Psychological safety is a group climate where team members are comfortable that they will not be negatively judged or ridiculed if they speak up with an idea. To create psychological safety, a culturally intelligent leader creates a team culture that builds trust based upon some shared values and practices agreed to by each member of the team. ●

PART II: THE 5D PROCESS FOR CULTURALLY INTELLIGENT INNOVATION

Once the climate is in place, you need to manage the *process* for culturally intelligent innovation. The 5D process

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for culturally intelligent innovation includes the steps of define, dream, decide, design and deliver. ●

Define: Align Diverse Expectations and Goals

The global companies that most successfully and consistently innovate are the ones that spend more time developing a specific goal and strategy up front. Everyone on the team needs to be able to answer the who, what, why, when and how questions related to the innovation at hand.

Paradigms of Global Innovation

One way to gain a shared mental model is to discuss what paradigm for cross-border partnerships best characterizes what you want to develop and how. The most common paradigms for working across borders are internationalization, localization and globalization.

Internationalization is when Culture A expects Culture B to adopt A's way of doing things. Localization often emerges as a knee-jerk reaction to the perceived ills of internationalization. Culture A decides that the best way to relate to Culture B is to allow B to fully retain its own cultural values and way of doing things.

The globalization paradigm is usually a better way of moving toward culturally intelligent innovation than internationalization or localization because it can draw the best from each culture involved. Think of the globalization paradigm as a Venn diagram where cultures overlap at the point of an intersecting goal or interest. McDonald's has internationalized its fast-food system and brand but globalized its menu offerings. They don't serve beef burgers in India, and they serve beer in Germany with many overlapping food items most everywhere in the world.

The greatest opportunity for innovation comes from creating and sustaining a fusion paradigm for working together that utilizes the best of the differences involved. The fusion approach seeks to minimize the interpersonal conflict that comes from the cultural differences and leverage the informational diversity that exists from them. It combines creativity with realism, and it purposely amplifies the differences through passionate discussion and disagreement rather than simply focusing on what you have in common. Fusion allows different cultural norms to coexist, and each person is invited to transcend and include her personal preferences as part of the team process.

Fusion Lab: Define

Here are a few leading practices to use when defining the goal and aligning expectations on a culturally diverse team.

1. Map your differences. Identify each team member's differences. Create a list with names and the most relevant differences each member brings to the team. Start with the two kinds of diversity that are most relevant for how you work together: visible diversity and underrepresented groups. Consider other differences that might also be relevant. Calculate the relative importance of the five trust factors for each team member.

2. Compare your expectations. Next, compare your expectations for the job that needs to be accomplished, including a list of criteria for a successful outcome. What would "better" look like for reaching this goal? Find ways to get input from diverse groups. Avoid trying to convince each other at this point. The purpose right now is to understand the different expectations that exist. Solicit contrary opinions, listen and seek to understand.

3. Take each other's perspective. Once you've mapped your differences and expressed your varied expectations, try to empathize with each other's perspectives. Set personal expectations and preferences aside for a moment, and ask everyone to take on the perspective of someone who views the goal or project differently from how he does.

4. List what you have in common. Begin with the obvious (e.g., all working for the same organization, all serving on the same innovation team), and then explore some of the other shared similarities that might be easily overlooked. This can be a useful way of developing a sense of team, and you might find some creative ideas that lie implicitly within some of the unique similarities you share.

5. Define a common goal. Finally, define the shared goal for the innovation at hand. You want each individual to have a sense of personal ownership while also seeing the goal as something that is bigger than any one person can pull off alone. The best goals on a fusion team are viewed as "mine" and "ours." Get agreement around a one-sentence summary of the goal. Don't move on until you have consensus. Describe what successfully achieving the goal would look like.

Taking the time to create a shared mental model and define your goal is a non-negotiable for a diverse team. ●

Dream: Generate Diverse Ideas

Communication is the biggest challenge when trying to get diverse teams to dream up ideas together. Cultural

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differences heighten individuals' anxiety and uncertainty for speaking up. What you say and how you say it is strongly shaped by your cultural background.

For example, direct eye contact signals attentiveness in some cultures, while it's a sign of rudeness in others. Some individuals come from a cultural orientation that feels ideas and emotions should be expressed openly, while others have been told to repress demonstrating their feelings. As trivial as these may sound, such differences directly shape team chemistry, trust and productivity.

Fusion Lab: Dream

Everyone wants to be heard. An intentional strategy is needed to give diverse participants culturally intelligent ways to voice their ideas. There are several practices you can use to effectively manage the process of generating ideas from a diverse team.

1. Redefine “speak up.” The very words “speak up” sound like an assertive, verbal advancement of your ideas. Underscore that participation and offering ideas is what is needed most — but how that's done can vary according to the distinct preferences across your fusion team.

2. Give advance warning. Let groups know ahead of time that you want their input. Not only does advance warning reduce the anxiety of participants who don't like to be put on the spot, but all team members are likely to have more thoughtful input if they spend some time thinking about it ahead of time.

3. Be explicit about expectations. If every participant needs to offer something, be sure that's understood. You can say something like “I need to hear back from everyone by the close of business on Friday. You can either offer your input at our meeting this afternoon, by talking with me one-on-one or by sending me an email.” ●

Decide: Select and Sell Your Idea

In order for ideas to be translated into solutions, you have to decide which idea to pursue and convince people to adopt it. Selecting an idea and selling it to others are two sides of the same coin. Part of how you determine the best idea to pursue involves anticipating how you will convince others that it successfully solves a problem.

Fusion Lab: Decide

Consider the fusion strategies that follow to decide and sell your idea.

Encourage bottom-up-intervene top-down. One of the biggest cultural differences on diverse teams is the varied cultural preferences for top-down versus

flat approaches to leadership and decision making. A fusion approach utilizes both. Alibaba in China, HCL Technologies in India, Banco Galicia in Argentina and Pixar in the United States are all companies that have created an environment that fosters bottom-up innovation. They understand that the more ideas and decisions that bubble up from the bottom of the organization, the more innovation is likely to occur. However, the leaders in all these companies also exert strong and timely direction.

Vote. In many cases, a diverse team organically reaches consensus about which idea to pursue. But when conflict and indecision are keeping the team from making a decision, consider voting. Voting helps you move forward and prevents you from bulldozing ahead with an idea that is supported only by the most vocal participants.

Map reactions to the idea and pitch. Team members from more collectivist cultures may want to involve their sponsors and constituencies as part of the decision-making process, whereas those from individualist cultures may be more comfortable selling the decision of the group to the constituencies after it's been decided. A fusion approach allows these preferences to coexist rather than insisting everyone do the same thing. One way to do this is by giving everyone ample information and time so that the collectivist participants or stakeholders can be approached before the decision is finalized.

Recruit early adopters. Some cultures, organizations and individuals thrive on being first, but most prefer to know that someone else has tried it. A fusion approach gets early adopters to get buy-in from both groups — inviting those who want to be the pioneers and using the experience of the pioneers to convince cultures that are more risk-averse. ●

Design: Create and Test for Diverse Users

In today's image-conscious world, the way an innovation is designed and tested can easily make or break its success. A culturally intelligent approach to innovation requires developing a design and testing process that accounts for cultural differences in form and function. What a user in one culture may find efficient, another may find clunky.

The golden rule of design and testing is to know the user. When the people working on the project reflect the values and needs of the users, a better solution will emerge. And the more a team utilizes its diversity in the design and testing process, the greater the likelihood the

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innovation will be useful to a diversity of users. Design also has to be informed by observing users up close.

Fusion Lab: Design

Take time to consider and respond to the following questions when designing and prototyping your innovation, and make the most of your diverse team to come up with a fusion design.

1. What needs does it meet? Do you have to create the need (e.g., the iPod or Starbucks), or is there already pent-up demand for this innovation? What cultures will have the hardest time seeing the need? How will the needs influence the way you design it? Taking the time to identify the felt and real needs of your target users can help inform the way you design the innovation.

2. What prior knowledge is assumed? Does the consumer know how to use it effectively, and what kind of instruction and support needs to be offered? Be sure to benefit from those who have no insider knowledge to see what implicit assumptions and tacit knowledge may be guiding your design process.

3. What does the design communicate? What does the color communicate? How does it make you feel? Might there be hidden meaning to the images you aren't aware of? Have you accounted for language differences? How does the level of functionality influence users from different cultures?

4. With whom should you test? Users are excellent at reacting to concrete, visible designs. They bring important "folk knowledge" to the innovation that may have otherwise been overlooked by the design team. ●

Deliver: Implement Global Solutions

The ideas that change the world are built around the not so sexy implementation plans that translate ideas into real-life solutions. Diversity is unlikely to impede implementation as long as you develop a plan for implementation. And if you've consciously managed the diversity throughout each step of the 5D process, you will be much better positioned to implement effectively.

There are a number of things that stand in the way of diverse teams delivering innovative solutions, including technical knowledge/skills gap, skepticism and resistance to change, time consumed and procrastination.

Fusion Lab: Deliver

A fusion approach to implementation requires attention to the following areas:

1. Formalize leadership. Leaders of fusion teams need to consider the bottom-up/top-down paradox of fusion leadership. Formalizing this kind of leadership includes a project lead, senior leadership support and champions.

2. Agree on timing. Discuss how to develop timelines based upon expectations that meet the objective and account for how to make the most of the diverse participants involved in the project.

3. Define your communication and conflict-resolution process. Create a specific process for how communication will occur and when and the process for how decisions will be made. How often will you meet? What is the purpose of those meetings? What kind of communication protocol is needed? The more diverse your team, the more explicitly you need to spell this out.

4. Motivate and monitor follow-through. Culture plays a strong role in how we're motivated. Stop and consider what kind of value completing this project has for the other parties involved. Look at the different cultural-value orientations on your team. What are the benefits for meeting the deadline (or the consequences for not doing so)?

5. Launch, and do a post-implementation review. The launch may happen incrementally or all at once. Determine what kind of fanfare, if any, is appropriate for the various markets involved. And be sure to have all hands on deck for the inevitable glitches. Highlight the diverse inputs that led to the innovation. Before you move on to the next project, create a deliberate plan to audit the implementation process and assess it in light of the goal defined at the beginning of the process.

Leading companies need talent who are creative and adept at working across different cultures. Culturally intelligent innovation offers a way to awaken the sleeping giant within diverse teams. A fusion approach that intentionally utilizes diversity leads to the best, innovative solutions. ●

RECOMMENDED READING LIST

If you liked *Driven by Difference*, you'll also like:

1. *Flex* by Jane Hyun, Audrey Lee. *Flex* offers a proactive strategy for managers to navigate and leverage diversity effectively.

2. *The Inclusion Dividend* by Mark Kaplan, Mason Donovan. Diversity and inclusion are no longer just the right thing to do. Creating a truly inclusive outcome with employees, customers and other stakeholders requires a focused change effort.

3. *The Four Lenses of Innovation* by Rowan Gibson. Gibson presents an innovation methodology for systematically stretching your thinking, discovering inspiring new insights and producing high-quality ideas.