

# **Culture: An Upgrade**

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## Preface

The word "culture" has been bothering me—and everyone else in anthropology—for quite some time. It started in Anthro 1 in 1964, when the professor talked at the same time about what was then called "the psychic unity of mankind" and "cultural relativism." We humans were all the same *and* incredibly different from each other, both at the same time. Both those things are of course true. But the emphasis in those days was on the cultural relativism part, on the differences that one could expect to find when moving outside of one's own culture and dealing with people who were members of another.

In the meantime, between then and now, "culture" became a buzzword of our times, a concept found in countless academic disciplines, organizational pronouncements, commercial venues, media, and just plain ordinary conversations. In some ways this is a good thing, a widespread recognition that we are not all the same and that this is normal. But in other ways it is a very bad thing. For instance, the concept is used to pretend we've understood and solved a problem when all we've done is conceal it. Or, another example, it makes us think we understand everything about a person or a group when in fact we've just noticed a part and overgeneralized it into an outdated stereotype. More examples to come in this book.

Worst of all, the way culture is used, it actually distorts how we live now. We live in a technologically-enabled globally-connected world where many different sources shape us and are shaped by us in turn. Most of us mix and match these sources in fluid and dynamic ways that can change from time to time. A global marketing survey I read years ago speculated that any two kids from any two urban metropolitan areas in the world now have more in common with each other than either one does with their grandparents. That might not be true, but it is a plausible hypothesis that describes where the world is going.

I've complained about this problem in a couple of places before, and as an applied type who mostly works outside of anthropology and the university I run into it most every day. I finally decided I wanted to do something more constructive than just complain—primarily for general readers and students—to upgrade the culture concept so it would be useful in today's world. This book is the result. I decided to go back to the beginning of culture, when it first emerged with *Homo sapiens sapiens*, and then track its characteristics into modern times to show why it doesn't work anymore, and then suggest a way to change it for life in a twenty-first century global society.

Writing the book turned into an example of the problem the book deals with. First of all, I was dealing with a massive amount of highly specialized knowledge in virtually every detail I wrote. Concepts or ideas I came across or thought I invented led to a web search led to several fields interconnected with others led to what I could imagine would be a five year program of graduate study. I'm not complaining, just stating a fact.

Then because of this web reach I saw clearly how Americo-centric I was being, using mostly American material. This is a known American pathology that I've heard from international colleagues for years. But now with the web it just adds to the problem. Consider all the other English language countries with their own massive programs of research and practice in this culture area. And then I'm not too bad at German and Spanish, so consider all that material that I'm neglecting. And then there is all the material I can't access. Japan comes to mind because of a trip there years ago to a linguistics conference and the shock at all the interesting work I knew nothing about thanks to the descriptions from a couple of English-speaking colleagues. Again, I'm not complaining, just stating a fact.

I'm not going to try and invent the new Esperanto and translate everything into it. And I'm not going to wait until we get from Web 2.0 to Web 20.0 when we might have search engines that can do more organizational and synthesizing work. What I am going to do is draw from things I have learned about over the years, and add in a small sample of the recent work of thousands of colleagues around the world, to try and upgrade the culture concept to a form more useful for life in a global society of unexpected and surprising and frequent human differences. The main change will be this: A shift from thinking of culture as a name for differences to culture as a name for the characteristics and knowledge that humans share that make an understanding of those differences possible. Culture will serve the same purposes that the old fashioned use of the term wants to address, but it will do so from a very different understanding of what it means and how to put it to work.

In Chicano Spanish they say "dale gas," give it gas. In Austrian German they say "wenn schon, denn schon," harder to translate, but roughly "if it's the case then get on with it." In the streets they say "money talks and bullshit walks," "money" often used metaphorically for action. In my youth we used to say, "Let's get this show on the road." As Toby Keith sings in his country song, "Let's get down to the main attraction, with a little less talk and a lot more action." So let's get on with upgrading culture.

## Chapter One

### Culture Is Broken

Let me start with the title. *Culture: An Upgrade*. It's obviously meant to catch the attention of a real or virtual bookstore browser. But it's not just marketing. Culture is "an ordinary word," as Groucho used to say on his TV show *You Bet Your Life*, "something you use every day." He always picked a "secret word" for each show, and, if contestants said it, a duck fell from the ceiling and they won a hundred dollars. The way "culture" is used nowadays, it would be raining ducks if Groucho was in charge.

Here's the problem: Culture is a hindrance posing as a helper. It is now promiscuously used to pretend that something has been described or explained when in fact it has only been squashed with a label like an insect with a flyswatter. At the same time, anthropologists—the culture professionals—routinely throw up their hands, if not their lunch, trying to make sense of what the concept might mean in our globally-connected post-structural, post-colonial, post-everything world.

In this day and age, saying "culture" is like going into Las Chivas, my neighborhood coffee shop, and saying you'd like a "cup of coffee." Coffee has so many meanings now, on the one hand, and on the other, most of the old meanings just plain don't work anymore. Odds are good that the waitperson, I mean the barrista, will *not* answer the question with "cream or sugar?" He'll say, "What kind of coffee," and, if he is kind, he'll help you along until you got to what you wanted, a half-decaf half-skim double tall cappuccino on the dry side with a shot of amaretto.

The fact that the term *culture* has so many meanings can be verified with a week's worth of reading of popular media. You might read, just to offer a few examples, about the *culture* of gangs, the *culture* of IBM, the *culture* of Iraq, and the *culture* of Northern New Mexico. None of those uses of culture will tell you much, if anything at all, about gangs, IBM, Iraq, or Northern New Mexico. In fact, they will conceal most of what a reader might want to know if they were really interested.

In that list of examples, culture labels a loosely defined set, a collection of people who have just one attribute in common, that attribute being whatever comes after the word *of* in the phrase *culture of X*. After the labeling, we believe we know more about the labeled group than we did before. By naming it as a

culture we think we have described or explained something, a fallacy that comes from the old traditional use of the concept. We think we understand a lot about the labeled group but actually whatever prior stereotypes we brought to the moment will continue unblemished.

From a group insider's point of view, the concept can also serve political-rhetorical purposes. In management jargon culture often means, what I think our business *should* become. As another example, consider the culture of Northern New Mexico, the place I call home now. It is complicated social territory, a place where a large number of histories intersect within a comparatively small population--different waves of Native Americans, Hispanics and Anglos over the centuries, each of those labels in turn lumping together many significantly different groups, each of those groups in turn having histories of blending and intermarriage as well as separation. One often hears culture used to represent the political and economic interests of a real or imagined constituency. Culture becomes a legal concept, a rallying point, a bargaining tool, or a commodity, or all four plus something else.

The traditional academic use of the culture concept isn't in much better shape. In the old days, anthropologists used it as a comprehensive and coherent label for a small-scale society. The Navajo, to take another New Mexico example, were called a culture. Say a hypothetical anthropologist lived with them for a year or two, although in this case the *them* covers a lot of territory and a fairly sizable population, about 175,000 people on 26,000 square miles of reservation, and that doesn't include Navajo living elsewhere. So right away we've got the problem an older Chicano student had when I taught in Texas. He came to the office to ask a question. "You know this book you assigned, *The Mexican-Americans of South Texas*," he asked? "Yes," I said. "Well, the title should say *some*."

That little problem is just the tip of the iceberg. Anthropology used culture as a label that covered all of what a person was. The concept described people and then explained and generalized them as members of a particular culture, and only of that culture. Everything the anthropologist saw and heard and learned was part of Navajo culture, to stay with that hypothetical example.

A couple of years ago I went to the reservation for the first time, as a hiker/tourist, not as an anthropologist. I noticed in the supermarket that by appearance alone there were dozens of different kinds of Navajo, everything from blue spiked hair to red velvet skirts. Then I overheard conversations where one Navajo would talk about others in terms of whether or not they were *traditional*. The evaluation ran from

yes or no to several points in between. Then a young woman told me that the real badge of identity was a personal connection through kin to the Long Walk, when the U.S. relocated the tribe in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to what was in fact a concentration camp. She didn't mention language or clan, which is what I'd expected to hear. She reminded me more of exile and return and holocaust conversations I'd had with Israelis than of anything I'd read about the Navajo.

This superficial vignette is enough for the moral of the story. Anyone now, Navajo or anyone else, is a mix of cultures of many different sorts, and the mix can vary from one situation to another, and the person can vary in their attitude towards different parts of the mix, and anyway any particular culture in the mix is probably debated and changing from the point of view of its members. An African-American call-in radio show in Baltimore, for example, fascinated me, an old white guy working in that city. I listened to callers debate, day after day, what it meant to be African-American. It meant something to everyone; but exactly what it meant varied all over the place.

In anthropology it is not news that the old culture concept doesn't work anymore. The old concept carries connotations of a closed system, frozen in time, with a comprehensive and consistent image of what a person is and how he/she should act. No more. Nowadays the term of art is "globalization," as it is in many other popular and professional conversations and writings around the world. And globalization means we have to rethink the old idea of culture when we talk about a particular person or a particular group. A person nowadays isn't just wrapped in a single culture. A person nowadays is wrapped in ... what?

Culture developed in what anthropologists call the *ancestral condition* among hunting-gathering bands, roughly forty thousand years ago. We live in a world wildly different from the ancestral condition. In the famous words of two founders of evolutionary psychology, "Our modern skulls house a stone age mind" (Cosmides and Tooby, 1997). Culture is, like, soooo ancestral condition, as someone fifty years younger might put it.

The old image of culture is what fired the anthropological imagination for decades. Not so long ago, professors of anthropology were still hunting for the last primitive culture. Some readers may have read about the madness around the discovery of the so-called Gentle Tasaday in the Philippines in the early

1970s. Anthropologists, and many others, wanted to believe that a genuine *primitive* culture still existed in the modern world. The discovery was followed by accusations of fraud, that a local rich guy paid some indigenous people to imitate an undiscovered isolated tribe. A recent book tells the convoluted and controversial story (Hemley, 2007).

In the 1990s I was lucky enough to have a chance to chat with a justice of the supreme court in Palau. The island nation had achieved independence from the United States a few years earlier, in 1992. I was visiting the country as a tourist/diver, but a Palauan colleague in public health had invited me to a few social events. When the justice learned I was an anthropologist, he told me a story about the late William Gladwin, an anthropologist who had done fieldwork for years in Micronesia, a man whose personal integrity and scholarly work was, and is, among the most admired in the field. He had helped out as an unpaid consultant, at Palau's invitation, to make the transition from United Nations protectorate under U.S. administration to a "compact of free association." The justice's affection for Gladwin was obvious. But, he said, the anthropologist was too biased towards traditional culture when it came to drafting the new constitution. The island, said the justice, had to acknowledge it, but they couldn't build a late twentieth-century nation on the basis of ancestral custom.

The justice's argument is also the argument of this book. Culture has become part of the problem, not part of the solution. Now cultures are loose cannons, or was that canons, of many calibers in the social fields of our global world.

Let's look at a modern buzzword that puts the current confusion about culture under the spotlight. That buzzword goes by the name of *diversity*. Diversity means, what do we do now that we're stuck in organizations full of people from all these different *cultures*? To show that it isn't only an issue discussed by the academic elites over white wine and brie, here's a picture from a company, ADT, that deals with security systems for home, business and government ([www.adtprimevision.com](http://www.adtprimevision.com)).



The buzzwords in the commitment statement are world class. This from the so-called real world of business that complains about academic jargon. But the picture does show that, whether in the English Department or the ADT boardroom, whether post-structural theorist or security-obsessed capitalist, "cultural" diversity is an issue of our times.

Diversity isn't the only name for an obsession with cultures. Europeans talk more in terms of *inclusion* and *exclusion*. See <http://www.inclusionexclusion.nl/site/> for an example of how they have institutionalized diversity under a different flag. In the U.S. and elsewhere the phrase *identity politics* has become cultivated territory, meaning the organization of a political movement to struggle against injustice on the part of some category of person. The online *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* will enlighten you on its history and current shapes at <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/identity-politics/>. A best-selling book in 1995 by Benjamin Barber, *Jihad vs. MacWorld*, described the conflict between a global world and the rise of tribal-like identities as a rallying point to fight against it.

All of these perspectives—and many others—see diversity as an *issue*, a *problem*, a characteristic of modern life that needs to be recognized, understood, and dealt with.

Why is it a problem? Haven't different kinds of people gotten along in the past? Of course they have. But in the past there were *bounded diversity spaces*. Port towns or centers of trade or capitals of empire are classic examples, spaces where political and religious and commercial interests required the presence of very different kinds of people. Such bounded spaces existed in microscopic versions as well.

The famous bar scene from *Star Wars* is an interplanetary version. And I remember when I first read Herman Melville's novel *Moby Dick*. What a diverse crew that ship had.

One reason diversity feels different now is, *diversity spaces are no longer bounded*. Everywhere on earth is a diversity space. The term no longer sorts things out, because diversity is everywhere.

Another reason diversity feels different is because of *rhythm*. In the past, a new population would appear and then time would pass as they fit into and altered the local historical flow. Where I live now in New Mexico, the Athabaskan Indians—ancestors of the Navajo and Apache—rolled into the land of the Pueblo Indians by 1500, some say earlier than that. The Pueblo themselves, who arrived thousands of years ago, speak several languages, so it isn't hard to imagine diversity issues at archeological sites like Chaco and Mesa Verde. The first Spanish settlement was founded in 1598. The Americans took over the Southwest in 1848. Now Santa Fe officially celebrates its tricultural identity in tourist brochures, though the predictable tensions brew under the myth and occasionally blow through the surface like historical magma. But at least all those diverse groups had some time to get used to each other, for better or for worse.

It's not like that anymore. Diversity shifts and moves like an amoeba on steroids. Encounters with new diversity in one's lifetime will likely happen many times, indirectly if not directly. The rhythm of diversity has accelerated from whole notes with a couple of full rests to a twelve bar flurry of sixteenth notes that make for what jazz genius John Coltrane called sheets of sound.

Diversity has gone from bounded to everywhere and from infrequent to continuous. It's not quite that dramatic, but it often feels that way. The reason so many people and organizations all over the world are all of a sudden worried about diversity is, it's everywhere, all the time.

Diversity is a problem, something a lot of different people and organizations think they need to do something about.

Why do they think it's a problem?

Listen to the complaints and it's obvious that diversity is used to explain why something isn't working right. What isn't working right? How do you tell?

Things don't get done as easily as they used to. It's not that anyone has a personal goal to disrupt

those things—I'll use *tasks* as the general cover term for things that people are doing at any particular moment. Of course there are always some people around who enjoy destroying a task, with or without diversity. That's the universal and eternal problem of what to do with the terminally obnoxious and the town drunk.

No, diversity is about people, usually with good intentions, who have different notions of what tasks are and different expectations of how they should go about doing them. More and more often, these diverse people suddenly, perhaps surprisingly, find themselves doing the same task together. They work together. They live together. They go to the same school. When they get sick they go to the same hospital, and when they get in trouble they deal with the same police department and court system. They vote in the same elections, in places that have them, and they fill out the same tax forms.

But they don't see things the same way. And their institutions—community associations, businesses, schools, hospitals, police stations, etc.—are run by people who don't see them the same way, either.

They all have different *perspectives*, on what they believe, on what they value, on the general way they think things should be done, and on the specific details of what any particular task involves. The differences might be trivial and easily change. "Oh, sure, sorry, didn't know that's how things worked here." Or the differences might be deep-seated, learned as a child and used habitually as an adolescent until they became the natural order of things. "What? That's ridiculous. No one in their right mind would do things that way."

The original good intention can turn into annoyance and ferment into anger. For a person who grew up in a specific place, it can turn into hatred of outsiders. For a new arrival, it can turn into feelings of persecution and intolerance. For people at a distance, it can turn into censorship of media and outsider contact. For any person trying to do a task with others, it can turn into frustration that makes them want to do the task only with people who think and act just like them. Taken to extremes, it turns into war.

Tasks that started with purpose and value go straight to hell in a handcart.

Sometimes the intentions and expectations are poisoned from the start. An ancient historical event turned into a mythic hatred, an image of *those people* crystallized and hardened from real past experiences of oppression, a need for scapegoats to explain why something in life has gone wrong. This is the diversity

problem with teeth in it, harder to change because it's part of who the malcontents think they are.

Those historical events or past experiences may have left a residue of lives gone terribly wrong. The theft of an ancestor's land, commerce that destroyed the usual way of making a living, invaders forcing aside at gunpoint beliefs and values that define who you are—or rather, were. The diversity problem might have deep roots indeed.

Come visit Santa Fe and listen to a Pueblo Indian comment on the statue of the conquistador in the church, or hear a 'manito' or 'manita,' the old New Mexican Spanish word for Hispanic locals, tell you about the stolen land grants, or listen to an Anglo artist tell you how they can't pay the rent and have to move because of the growing number of part-time rich residents. And then, once you think you've gotten all those "cultural" issues straightened out, go to Zozobra, a local festival designed by an Anglo artist who was inspired by a Yaqui Indian ceremony. The festival is now used by local Hispanics to commemorate the "reconquest" of Santa Fe after the Pueblo revolt of 1680, with some Native Americans enjoying the celebration and others criticizing it in angry terms, as in, "what do you mean 'revolt,' white (Anglo *and* Hispanic) man?" (<http://www.zozobra.com/>).

How do we even begin to untangle all these "cultural" issues? Are they "cultural" at all? That's why I wrote this book, to try for a different angle on this so-called diversity problem, to try and understand better where it came from, back in the origins of modern humanity forty thousand years ago, and then to change the angle of vision to better suit our contemporary global world.

The emphasis in this book will be on how people with different perspectives, who actually do tasks together in real time, might handle that diversity. If enough people handle it better, things will improve long before any policies or programs accomplish anything. My motto for political change is a quote from a three by five card tacked to the wall of a waterfront Texas bar. The card said, "I must go, for there go my people, and I am their leader." Oddly enough, the card paraphrases a famous quote from Gandhi.

You see what I mean about culture?

Now and again a business journalist describes how a diversity or intercultural workshop actually makes things worse. Here's a hypothetical example, based on stories I've read and heard over the years.

Imagine a U.S. company with a workforce made up of immigrants from a few different countries and of native-born nationals from several different American groups. Say they all get along pretty well. It's a sane workplace with fair salaries and benefits and the boss shows respect to the employees.

But no place is perfect. Arguments happen now and again. So the boss decides maybe a little diversity training wouldn't hurt. The boss notices that arguments often involve people of different national backgrounds or different colors. The fallacy here is that with a mixed-up workforce, like he has in his company, the odds are that *any* argument between *any* two people over *any* thing will involve such differences, just by chance. But the boss attributes the arguments to cultural diversity.

What the boss doesn't know—to continue with this hypothetical example—is that *Tranh* is just generally obnoxious. Everyone says that, including the other Vietnamese-American employees. *Nina* is forever borrowing things from other cubicles without asking and forgetting to put them back, and *Les* schmoozes too much and too long and won't take hints to go away so you have to ignore him and then he gets angry.

Rather than deal with these obvious things, the boss thinks cultural diversity is the problem. He means well. So he orders up a daylong cultural sensitivity workshop.

At the end of the day, things are worse than they've ever been. The employees are now primed to have problems they didn't think they had before. The workshop exercises and forced confrontations and explicit discussion of hateful and hurtful things based on national origin and color has convinced them they really do have problems.

The workshop reinforced the old-fashioned notion of culture. In the hypothetical company, there *were* task disruptions, no doubt about that, but they were the kind of disruptions found everywhere in the world. Everywhere in the world there are people who get historical significance from having a negative impact on as many other people as possible. Everywhere someone will have a rule that what's yours is mine. Everywhere there are people who won't stop talking about themselves, even when it's obvious that a listener has other things to do.

These differences are the kind of differences you find anywhere in the world. True enough, some *groups* may have norms for more confrontational styles, or a more collective orientation towards property, or expectations that people will take longer turns at talk. But those *groups* will range from large to small,

short- to long-term, daily to once a year, and what with all the mixes and matches the make up people's perspectives nowadays there will likely be more variation *within* those groups than there will be *between* them. In a world like ours, the old idea of "a culture" is the wrong answer to the right question.

This mixing and matching of what we think of as cultures has acquired some different names. One, made popular in the work of Nestor Garcia Canlini, is the word *hybrid* (2005). Hybrid has some meanings that others object to (Lewellen, 2002). In fact, some people prefer words like "creole" (Hannerz, 1993), on the analogy with creole languages that formed from blends of a local and a colonial language.

For my purposes here, I'll stick with the term hybrid, with one modification on the dictionary definition: "A thing made by combining two different elements; a mixture." The modification is, there can be many more than just two elements in the mix. Take me, for instance. I'm of a generational culture, a sixties college student, early baby-boomer, retirement age. I'm of Chicago Irish ancestry on my father's side, unknown on my mother's, but the Irish part was never emphasized growing up, and my great-grandfather started out Protestant in Ireland. I'm a recovering Catholic who went to Catholic grammar school. I've lived and worked in Austria so much over the years that I'm part Austrian in a weird way. I've worked in the streets with heroin addicts. I've been a scuba-diver for decades. I'm an old white guy. Santa Fe, where I live now, is the first place I've ever seen where "whacky old white guy" is a recognized ethnic group.

As an old friend of mine used to joke, but enough about *me*, how do *you* like my new hairdo? This list of labels now used as cultural tags has only just begun. There are many, many more. All of those "culture" categories are labels someone might use to explain things I do or say. More than one will be relevant to any moment of explanation. To make things worse, the way any number of them mixes with the other will vary from time to time. Worse still, my relationship to any of those labels changes over time and will continue to do so. Worst of all, I regularly meet people, also members of one or more of those categories, with whom I have little in common, to the point where membership in the same category makes no sense.

I'm a multiple *cultural hybrid*. So is any reader of this book. I'll bet a large amount of money that the members of the Gentle Tasaday tribe are too, the "primitive" tribe mentioned earlier, certainly by now

in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. As one reviewer of the book about them mentioned earlier put it, they have become "professional primitives." Among many other things.

How did we get into this culture mess, and how are we going to get out of it in a useful way? The culture concept should help solve some of the most important problems of our era, but that era has made that same concept obsolete. What went wrong, and how can we set it right?

Here is the story to come in *Culture: An Upgrade*: Culture *does* name something that Homo sapiens created roughly forty thousand years ago, but given what the world has become, the concept just doesn't handle the 21<sup>st</sup> century hybrids that we humans have turned into. The very abilities that started us off on the modern human road now litter that same road with potholes, traffic cones, deer crossings, and various large fallen rocks. I'm going to spend the next three chapters, Two through Four, showing you how and why that happened.

So then what? Is the conclusion that the world's a cultural bitch and then we die? Possibly, but the goal for the book remains the same as the old-fashioned diversity idea, namely, to make it easier, more efficient, and more interesting to live in a world of differences. But the hybrid differences that we have to deal with have gotten more complicated, more unpredictable, and more variable in their mixes and their rates of change. They defy any simple cultural label.

That's the core problem with the way "culture" is used. We *still* use it to generalize a person or a group or a community or a nation. That strategy doesn't work in a world of hybrids, and that's what the global world has become. So in Chapter Five I'll take a few ideas from social network theory to describe how different the world is now compared to the ancestral condition, the time when modern human culture first emerged. The before and after picture will make it clear why the old idea of culture applied to today's world is like talking about computer capacity in cubic feet.

To bring the point home, I'll look at some research in Chapter Six, mostly from the field of social psychology. They dramatize in their experiments the way that cultural constraints worked in the ancestral condition and show how maladaptive they are now. More important still, those experiments cast into stark relief how social mechanisms from the old days—mechanisms that pushed cultures of hunting/gathering bands towards consistent and coherent—are maladaptive now. Chapter Six will offer advice on what to

*avoid* in the culture upgrade and—more radical still—how to think in terms of *perspectives* rather than cultures.

Chapter Seven will use some constructive ideas from the end of Chapter Six to start building an upgrade, but an upgrade with a semantic twist. From the beginning of the book the reader will see how "culture" has always been used in two distinct but related ways. On the one hand, what I call Culture with a capital C is about modern humans in general, about those abilities that appeared in what anthropologists call "The Culture Big Bang" about forty thousand years ago. But that same ability also produced differences among specific human groups, what I call culture with a small c. This small c culture is what most people nowadays mean when they use the term—The *differences* among human groups.

This book puts that small c concept aside, but it restores that other meaning of culture to center stage, Culture with a capital C, culture as a universal human ability. Of course there are and always will be human differences. But, slowly but surely, the book will shift to *mental model* and *perspective* as more fluid concepts that better handle the hybrids that most all of us have become.

In fact, the book will argue that an upgrade can be built on the fact that any two people now have more in common than they ever have before, ironically enough a result, in part, of the very global society that created the culture problem in the first place. Shared global histories and human universals provide the ground against which the figure of human differences can be managed. Chapter Seven develops this framework and applies a few fundamental principles from ethnography to look at differences in terms of perspectives and task instead of in terms of culture with a small c. But Culture with a capital C will survive as the universal human ground that makes mutual comprehension possible..

Finally, in Chapter Eight, the culture upgrade process is described as it actually works, in living color. I'll describe how disruptions appear in a task and how they are noticed and discussed. And I'll look at some dimensions of tasks to see how characteristics like aligned interests, trust and reputation, and risk play into success and failure at handling differences when they surface. In the end, if I've done my job, a reader will see how the culture upgrade avoids the mistake of tagging hybrid humans with static, over-generalized and atrophied labels. The upgrade, I hope, will leave the reader with a sense of culture as a label for what we share, a resource in terms of which our multiple—and comparatively minor—differences can be translated and aligned so that we can get on with our collective tasks.

In the next chapter I'll start with the emergence of modern humans and backtrack to figure out where culture came from. I'm not trained in archaeology or human evolution. But what struck me when I looked at several different sources was this: Culture was first of all a *universal human characteristic*, not *the* characteristic of one particular group of humans. Culture meant that a new version of humanity could remember and imagine and create and communicate in ways that jumped many orders of magnitude beyond anything that living species had accomplished before. Culture wasn't so much about the difference between *you* and *me*. Culture was about the difference between *us* and the other primates.

Culture started out by making humans different from primates in a way that then, in turn, made the humans different from each other. There's the problem right on day one, give or take a few thousand years. "Culture" is a word that anthropologists use to label both those things, both the new ability and what it produced. Culture as a human characteristic still makes sense in our contemporary times. Culture as a coherent and comprehensive name for a specific group of people, or as a name for the identity of a particular person, we need to rethink that—maybe drop it completely—and look at the modern global stew of hybrid perspectives in a different way.

None of this means that differences in perspective have gone away or ever will. On the contrary, I still marvel at how people in the same organization, who see each other day after day, react with surprise when I report on simple differences among them in the many applied projects I've done over the years. It still feels weird that something so obvious is so often missed by people who deal with each other all the time. Some of the reasons why this happens will be described in more detail later, especially in the chapter on social psychology.

For now the point is this: Making the connection between two different perspectives, more than ever before, will be done by understanding *variations on universal (or at least widely-shared) themes*, not by looking for old-fashioned *cultural differences*. Put another way, the differences that we deal with now, more often than not, will involve human universals and shared histories that take different shapes from different hybrid points of view. Put a third way, the variations will be based on differences that come up *everywhere in the world*, not differences that mean something strange and unrecognizable that only ever happen in one particular place.

Enough overview and introduction and empty promises. The proof, if proof there be, will come in

the culture upgrade pudding at the end of the book. It's time to start the journey from here to there.

