

# Practical Approaches

## To Our Increasingly Diverse Rural Workplace



**Diversity** includes *all the differences and similarities that affect how we work and live together.*

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**Rural Health Conference**  
**Duluth Civic Center**  
**June 26, 2012**



# Our Objectives

1. We will review major demographic changes taking place around us and how they can affect our workplace climate.
2. We will hear from a rural health provider examples of workplace diversity issues she has witnessed and explore the workplace impact of these differences and approaches tried.
3. After discussing common themes of diversity issues in rural settings, we will focus on actionable ideas to aid the rural workplace climate and make our workplaces more congenial for patients.

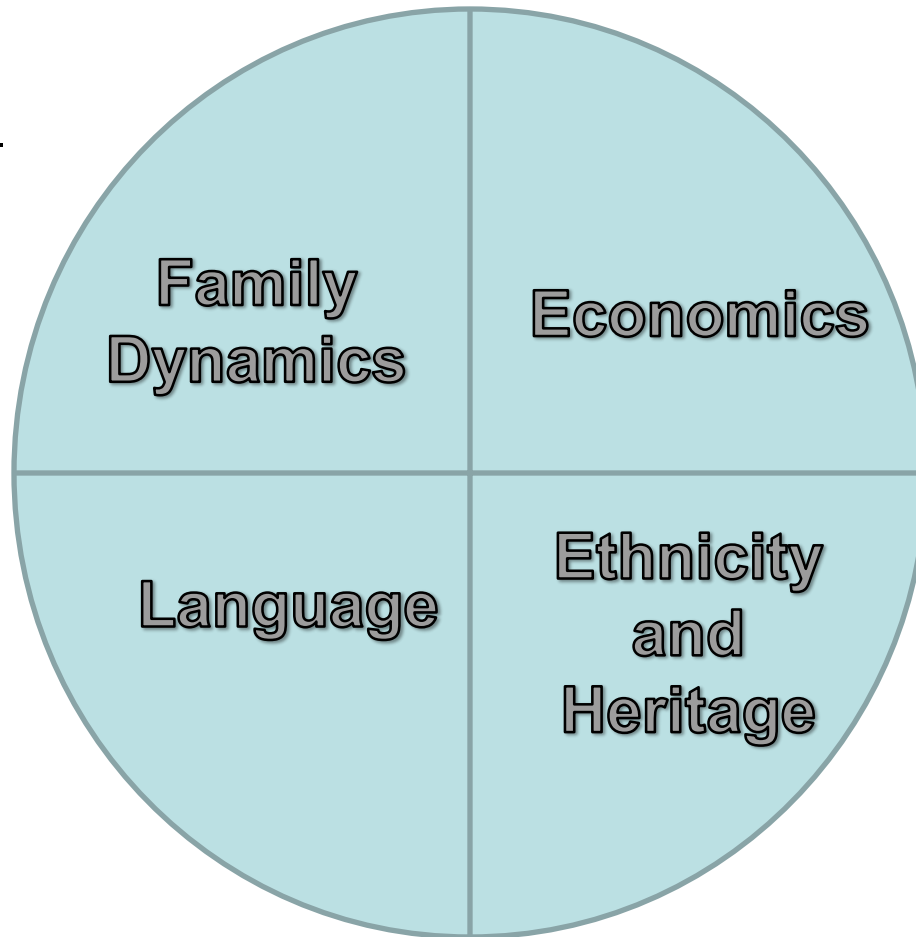
# From U.S. Census Data

Group	Population Size	Growth 2000-2010
Whites	72% -- 223.6 mil.	Only Latino portion grew; white population down
Latinos	16% -- 50.5 mil.	
Blacks	13% -- 38.9 mil.	12%
Asian	5% -- 14.5 mil.	43%
Native American, Alaskan Native	0.9% -- 2.9 mil.	18%
Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	0.2% -- 0.5 mil.	33%
Some Other Race	6% -- 19 mil.	



**So . . . Do You  
Know What a  
Quinceanera Is?**

# Families Are Changing Demographically



Recession-related growth in multi-generation families (Record 16.7% of the population)

Younger household heads with significantly less wealth than elders (Pew Research Center 1984-2009)

More families where English is not primary home language (12% of U.S. population born in another country.)

More grandparents ethnically different from grandchildren

# Potential For Five-Generation Workplace

- *Traditionals*
- *Boomers*
- *Generation X*
- *Generation Y, or Millennials*



**Key Idea:** Even more important than the **fact** of multiple generations at work is the potential for **significant differences** among these generations, due to technology, social, economic and other forces.

# About Minnesota – From U.S. Community Survey

- 60% Of MN Population of 5.3 million – Twin Cities.
- 40% -- Greater Minnesota
- Over 75.0% of Minnesotans -- Western European descent -- German, Norwegian, Irish and Swedish.
- In 2005–2007, 6.5% of Minnesotans were foreign-born, compared to 12.5% for U.S. The Latino population of Minnesota is increasing rapidly, other recent immigrants include Hmong, Somalis, other East Africans, Vietnamese, and emigrants from the former Soviet bloc.
- 2007 -- 90.4% of Minnesotans five years and over **spoke only English** at home. Remaining **9.6% spoke language other than English** at home.

# Summary: Our Encounters Are Changing

- Where we work
- Where we live
- Where we go to school
- Where we shop
- Where we express our faith
- In our families

**In Our Professions,  
How Can We Build Better Bonds  
Across More Encounters of Difference?**



# Setting the Stage for Our Stories: West African Griots and Griottes



Griots hold the memory of West Africa. At the festival marking the installation of a regional chief in Faraba Banta in October 1991, griotte Adama Suso (left) sings and Ma Lamini Jobareth (right) plays the kora. Photo by Richard Priebe. Article titled *"Keepers of History"* by Joanna Lott, Penn State Research.

**By Connecting to Relationships and Experiences,  
Storytelling Accelerates Learning  
And Activates Memory**

**Plaster and Solomon, Rural Health Association, June 2012**



# Debbie, Will You Take This Call?

## The Issue

Accented callers -- Latino, Russian, Hmong, Somali, East African, Vietnamese, etc. -- transferred from scheduler to clinical coordinator who has Ethiopian-born children. These callers are somewhat infrequent: so far no staff training in communicating in a multi-accented world.



## Workplace Impact

Clinical Coordinator at least once a week is pulled off-task, and scheduler is not learning new communications skills.



## Patient Impact

The patients know we, at least initially, are not comfortable talking with them. How comfortably will we give quality care in the home?

# **Solution-Finding in the Rural Workplace**

- **Reframe the situation:** Opportunity for the scheduler and others to learn new skills, not just for Debbie to use her skills 😊
- **Focus learning toward first encounters:** for example, names and greetings in a few key other cultures our clients are most likely to come from
- **“Living in a Multiaccented World”** workshop teaches accent patterns across major language types in the state
- **Telephone tricks:** scheduler and other staff can learn key phrases and approaches to ease telephone conversation across language and across accents.

# What's So Bad About Sitting in a Cubicle? Or a Touchdown Space? What More Do You Need?

## The Issue

Limited office space; cubicles; cubicle mates used to engaging each other in conversation; individual work still needs to be done.



## Workplace Impact

Productivity loss for introverts is more frustrating and more debilitating: introverts highly value private time and become less productive when unable to get it. Take work home? Family and tasks crop up.



## Patient Care Impact

Clinical coordinator has difficulty doing clinical coordinating. 😊

# Solution-Finding in the Rural Workplace



Plaster and Solomon, Rural Health Association, June 2012

# Themes of Our (Rural) Encounters With Difference

- **Workarounds:** We may be using workarounds to keep from confronting the difference and learning more about it.
- **First Encounters:** It may or may not be the first time we've encountered this difference.
- **Resources:** We may fear that we lack the resources to name this difference and we may lack the comfort to deal with it directly.
- **Conversation:** Sometimes a Courageous Conversation is needed to acknowledge the difference, learn about its impact, and work together to find reasonable approaches.
- **Accommodation:** In the case of a spiritual belief or a disability, we use an “interactive process” to seek out an appropriate accommodation.

# Three Lenses for Workforce Diversity Distilled from Thomas and Ely

## Assimilation

- We're all the same
- Prefer not to see or accentuate the differences
- Go by the rules of equal opportunity

## Differentiation

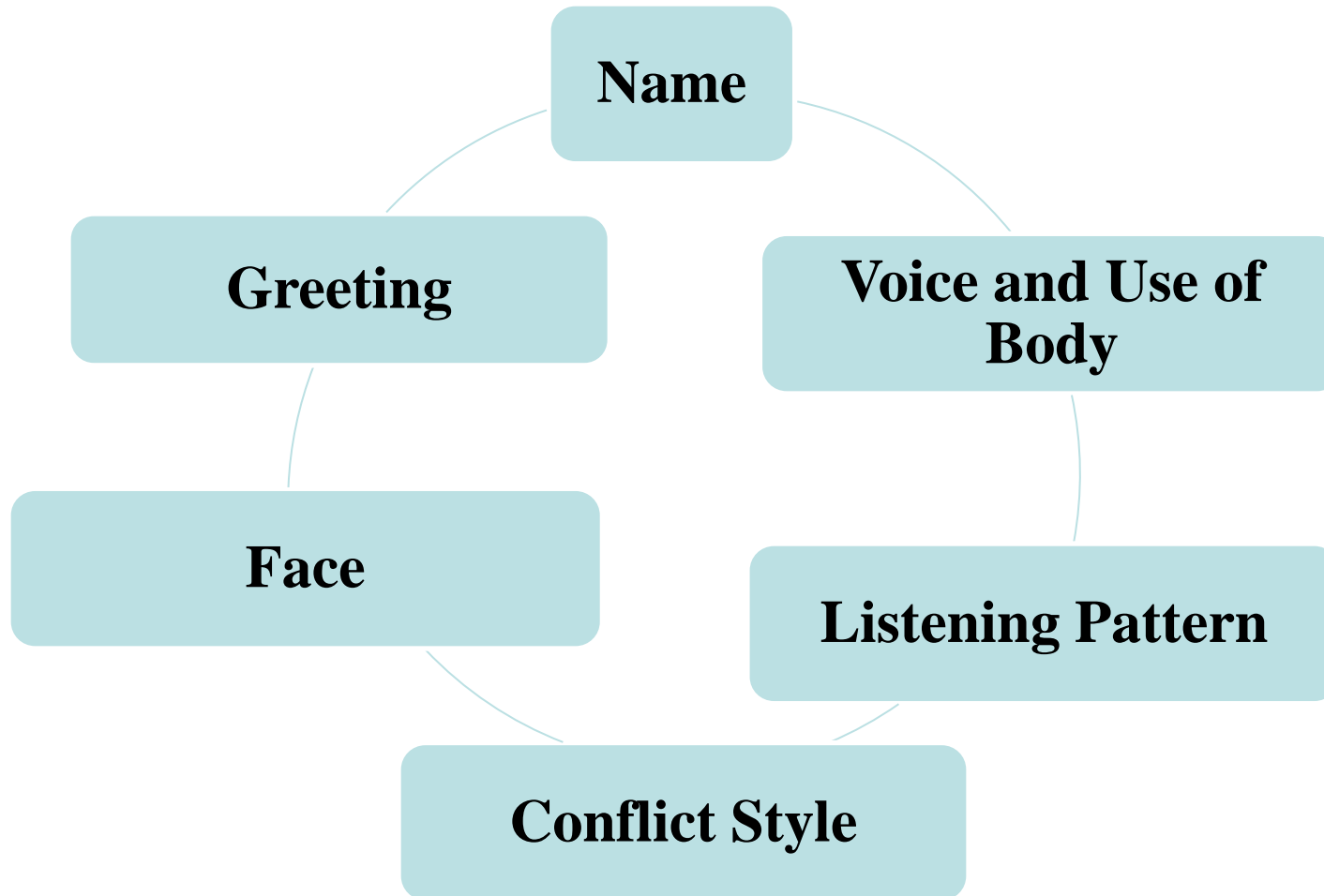
- We celebrate differences
- See the differences but may not understand them
- May focus on representational diversity

## Learning and Integration

- We allow employee differences to truly matter
- Diverse perspectives and approaches understood, valued and listened to

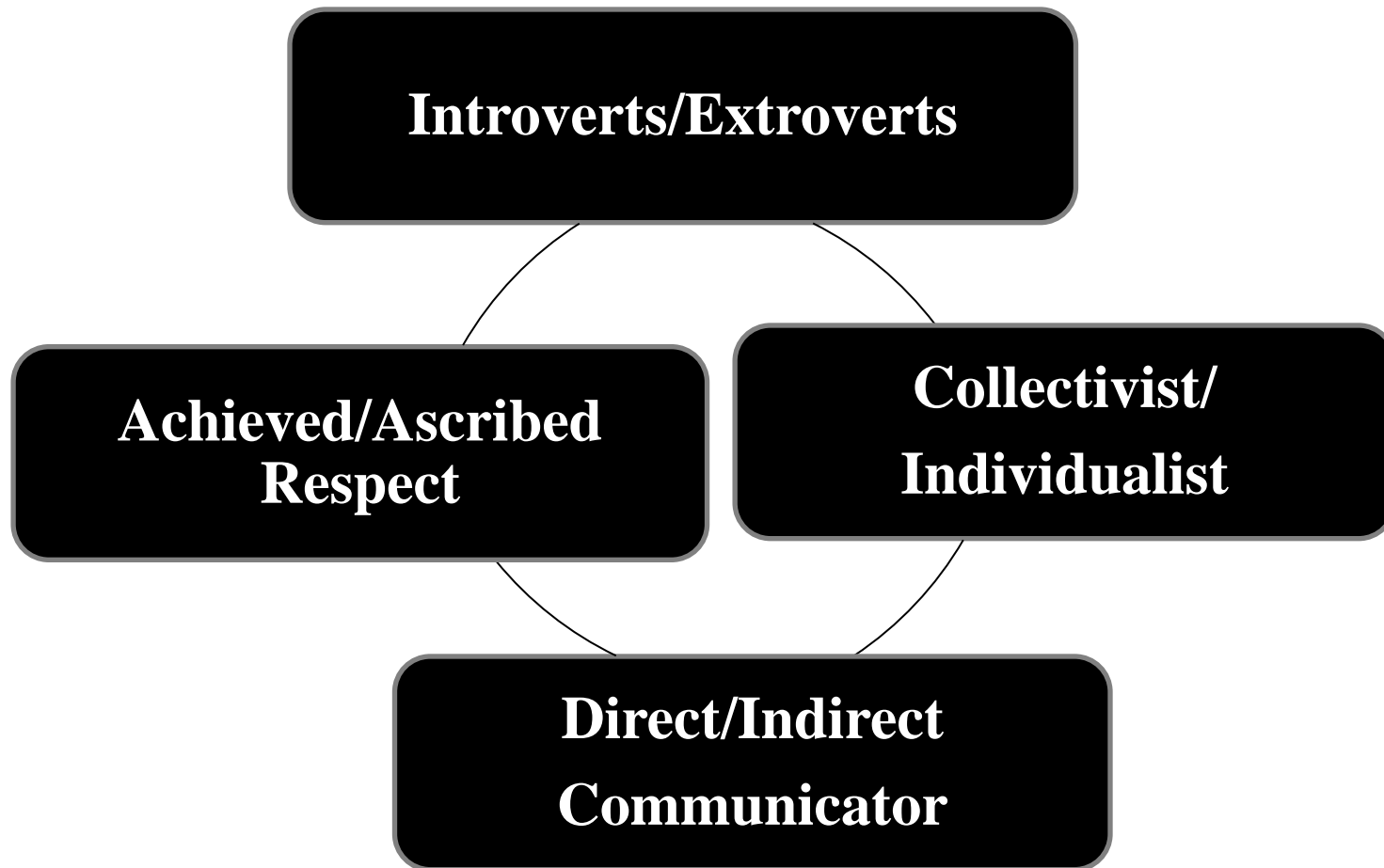
From David Thomas and Robin Ely, Making Differences Happen, a New Paradigm For Managing Diversity, 2011

# First Level Encounter – Greeting





# Second Level Encounter – Connecting



# One Example At the First Level: What's in a Name?

- **Susan Woulfe Plaster**

Names are:

A tie to culture, spirituality, family ties, generation, values, etc.

A way to learn about what was **given** as well as what was **lost or misunderstood**

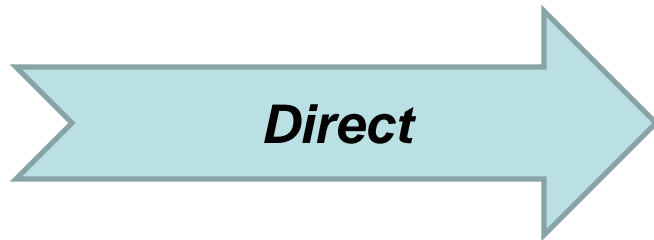
A generational marker

An opportunity for connection and bond

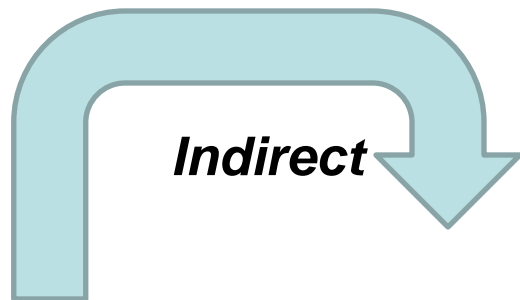
An opportunity for a respectful beginning

Often part of a cultural naming pattern

## **Example at the Second Level: Direct and Indirect Communications Styles**

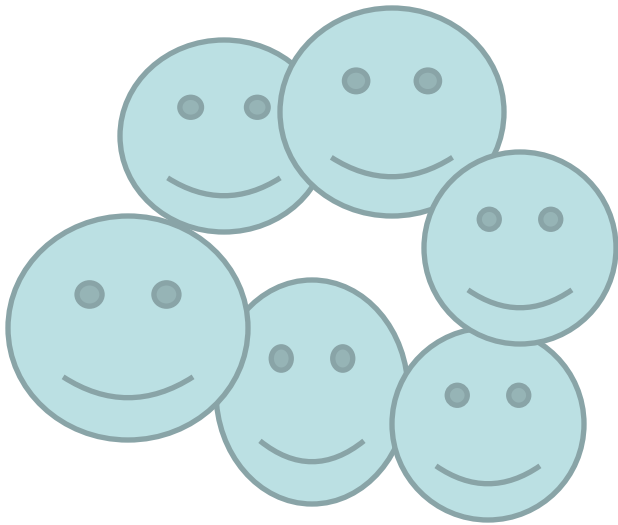


Meaning is largely to be understood from the words. Generally the person speaks for himself or herself.

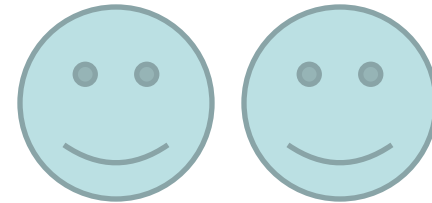


Words don't contain the meaning; voice, gesture, context, even what is not said may mean much more. An intermediary may be used

## Another Example at the Second Level: Extroverted and Introverted Styles



Think aloud  
At home in a group  
Gains energy through group  
time  
May pile one risk on another  
and evaluate less closely  
May be known as a great talker



Thinks first, then speaks  
At home with one or two others, or  
alone  
Gains energy through private time  
May evaluate risk closely  
May be known as a good listener

# 7 Ideas For Solution-Finding in the Rural Workforce

1. **Names and greetings are a key.** Learn five common men's and women's names for those you work with often.
2. **Advance work** on names and greetings will help you encounter differences more comfortably.
3. A **“soft face” and open gestures** may help when you are in doubt how to approach.
4. **Work on trust building** *before or along with* information gathering in cross-cultural situations.
5. **If you disrupt a listening pattern**, you may provoke a response, whether or not you can tell you did.
6. **If your style is direct**, realize the other person's style may be indirect. The reverse is true too.
7. **If you are an introvert**, you may need to explain yourself. **If you are an extrovert**, you may need to listen.

# Differences Aren't New to Rural or Urban Healthcare – The Number of Encounters is Increasing -- Giving Us More Chances for Dialogue.

Sue Plaster, M.Ed. focuses her consulting work on building bridges across differences. She helps organizations with diversity and cultural competence issues ranging from the workplace to customer concerns. Her industry experience includes health care delivery and manufacturing, controls manufacturing, and secondary education. She holds a Master's in Education from the University of Minnesota. Her undergraduate degree is in English, Speech and Education from Saint Catherine University. Sue has frequently presented for the Twin Cities Multicultural Forum.

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