

Emotional Intelligence and Diversity

A Model for Differences in the Workplace

Lee Gardenswartz, Ph.D., *Emotional Intelligence and Diversity Institute*;
Jorge Cherbosque, Ph.D., *Emotional Intelligence and Diversity Institute*;
and Anita Rowe, Ph.D., *Emotional Intelligence and Diversity Institute*

Scholars and practitioners alike have studied and applied the principles of emotional intelligence (EI) and diversity in leadership and organizational performance extensively in the past decade. The emotional intelligence and diversity model presented in this Practitioners' Corner merges the two organizational disciplines to leverage a synergy that practitioners can create when they apply the principles of EI and diversity together. The model applies to individual contributors, leaders, teams, and whole organizations. EI has emerged as a critical factor in workplace success for individuals and leaders and for teams. Diversity enriches an organization's ability to respond to its customers or other stakeholders with more creative and innovative products and solutions. However, to engage fully the diverse backgrounds, intellects, and cultural perspectives within an organization, individual employees and leaders must apply EI to building, maintaining, and leveraging relationships. The model presented here not only charts a pathway to using EI to leverage diversity, but also provides concrete steps for practitioners and their clients in bringing the model to life in the workplace.

Scholars and practitioners alike have studied and applied the principles of emotional intelligence (EI) and diversity in leadership and organizational performance extensively in the past decade. Goleman (1995) popularized the concepts of emotional intelligence (EI) and the emotional quotient. His essential assertion that EI surpasses IQ as a

determinant of workplace success has been extensively studied not only by Goleman and his associates but also by others scholars and practitioners (e.g., Bar-On & Parker, 2000).

EI encompasses interdependent competencies in both self-awareness and responsiveness to others. The emotionally intelligent individual remains aware of his or her emotions and manages those emotions in the moment to respond appropriately and productively to events and situations. With respect to others, EI manifests itself in three essential competencies: accurately empathic perception of others' feelings, appropriately responding to those emotions with empathy, and managing or assisting others in managing their emotional responses. In their groundbreaking work, *Primal Leadership*, Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee (2004) documented a decade of research into the vital role EI plays in successful organizational leadership. Leaders with high levels of EI tend to succeed, exercise strong influence over others, and achieve organizational goals. Low levels of EI in a leader present significant barriers to success. Organizations that embrace diversity, weave the notion of inclusion into their cultures, and align diversity work with their strategies have an increased likelihood of performing to their full potential. Diverse workforces can bring a wider variety of intellectual power and life experience to support the challenge of creating innovative solutions and products. Diverse workers appeal to a widely varying market segment, offer insights to help organizations develop innovative product designs, understand the role of service delivery, and provide

opportunities for customer-facing personnel to attract more diverse customer bases. Inevitably, however, the interactions among individuals with diverse backgrounds in terms of ethnicity, religion, religiosity, gender, sexual orientation, race, color, age, and other demographics, as well as status with respect to disability, military service, and tenure with the organization, trigger stress and even anxiety in the workplace. Sometimes this interpersonal relationship stress, which coworkers perceive emotionally and physically, interferes with performance. At worst, the stress and anxiety can lead to discord and counterproductive conflict, significantly distracting individuals and teams from their duties and responsibilities. At the least, this stressful dynamic shifts focus from the business opportunity or problem at hand toward unspoken prejudicial beliefs that create barriers to productivity, and toward excessive caution to be politically correct. When diversity work is applied with EI using the model presented here, EI helps address the sources of unproductive tension resulting from misinterpreted interactions among coworkers and increases the appreciable leverage that diversity can bring to the challenge of achieving an organization's potential for high performance levels.

Defining Emotional Intelligence and Diversity

Human beings function on both rational and emotional levels, but emotions are at the heart of their energy, commitment, and motivation. Feelings are also fundamental in forming reactions to the

differences people observe and perceive among themselves and others. Emotions determine whether people accept, reject, approach, avoid, or engage with others. The more one understands and manages emotional responses, the more one enjoys greater comfort in relationships, effectiveness in interactions, and inner peace.

The model of emotional intelligence and diversity (EID) presented here expands the traditional definition of *emotional intelligence* so that it is relevant in today's diverse world. EID encompasses the ability to feel, understand, articulate, manage, and apply the power of emotions to interactions across lines of difference. Diversity, those aspects of individual traits across which individuals and teams interact, helps people understand the multiple dimensions of individuality across which people see similarities and differences. Dealing with others across these lines of difference often triggers powerful responses that require emotional intelligence to manage. Figure 1 depicts these differences (Gardenswartz & Rowe, 1994).

EI is required in any environment where individuals interact. Wherever people interact, but especially in the workplace, differences such as values, language, behaviors, preferences, and norms bombard people daily. Whether these differences seem familiar or unfamiliar, intriguing or confusing, frustrating or delightful, desirable or disagreeable, they touch everyone at a feeling level and produce an emotional as well as an intellectual response. These emotional reactions lead to behaviors that can be effective or ineffective, depending on each individual's ability to deal effectively with those feelings. Success depends on achieving high levels of EI and employing EI in novel ways. The

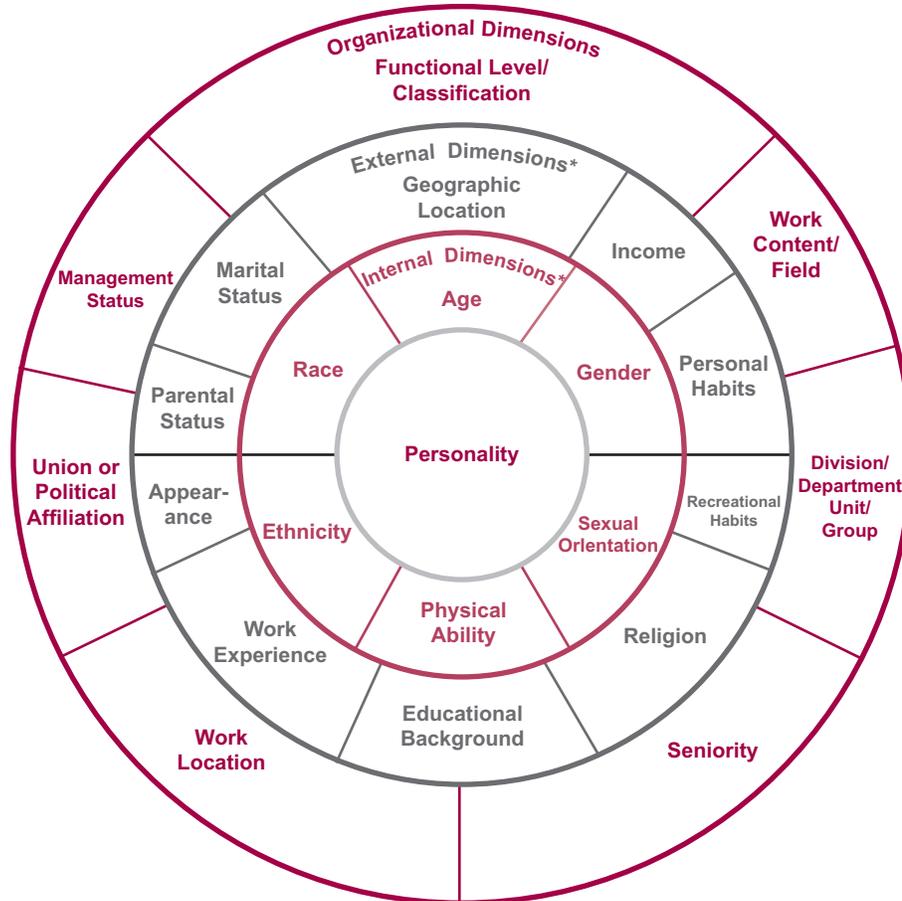
emotional intelligence needed to cope effectively in a diverse world involves both insight and action. This type of EI requires focus on both the self and others in order to have effective interactions and productive work groups, as depicted in Figure 2 (Gardenswartz, Cherbosque, & Rowe, 2008).

The four elements in the EID model in Figure 2 represent interacting and interdependent dynamics. *Affirmative introspection* requires self-awareness combined with self-reflection on the individual's values, passions, preferences, and worldview. *Self-governance* means managing emotional reactions to differences among people and to specific situations, so that the behavioral responses the individual chooses create constructive effects rather than self-defeating and destructive results. *Intercultural literacy* refers to continually and nonjudgmentally exploring and understanding others' cultural norms in terms of values, beliefs, and behaviors. *Social architecting* is a deliberate and conscious effort to structure relationships and social environments to increase the likelihood of productive and mutually beneficial relationships.

Affirmative Introspection

A critical first step in developing the ability to deal with differences is self-awareness in order to understand our reactions to others. This ongoing process involves reaching and maintaining a comfort with one's own identity, including an understanding of one's values, passions, preferences, and worldview. This introspection also involves becoming conscious of the biases, assumptions, and hot buttons that influence one's attitudes toward others.

Figure 1
Four Layers of Diversity



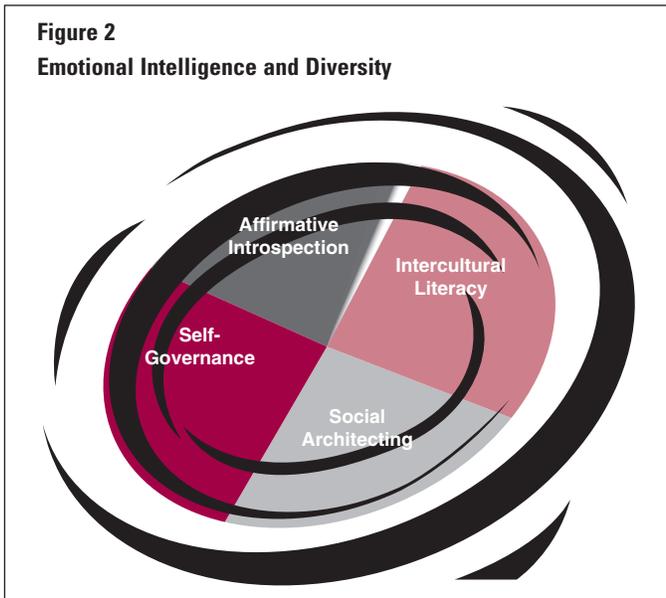
*Adapted from Loden and Rosner (1991).
Source: Gardenswartz and Rowe (2008).

Awareness precedes choice and change. Self-understanding helps one to predict behavior through knowing what evokes a particular emotional reaction and behavioral response. This insight is fundamental to managing emotional reactions and behavior toward others.

From ancient times, scholars and philosophers have advocated self-reflection and self-awareness. As the discipline of psychology emerged to its

present forms, many psychological scholars and schools of counseling and psychotherapy promoted developing affirmative introspection skills. In his book, *The Six Pillars of Self-Esteem*, noted psychologist Nathaniel Branden (1994) demonstrates why self-awareness is one of the pillars for building self-esteem and psychological health. The practice of living consciously is one of the greatest benefits clients gain from the therapeutic encounter.

Figure 2
Emotional Intelligence and Diversity



This practice, in fact, enhances their emotional intelligence.

Self-awareness does not necessarily ensure self-acceptance; often self-awareness results in neurotic self-consciousness and sometimes even leads to narcissistic self-absorption. However, many therapies and spiritual traditions link self-awareness to the contemplation and self-evaluation that leads to self-acceptance. Accepting differences among individuals, beginning with facets of the self, empowers individuals to take responsibility for themselves and their choices instead of disowning them, resulting in a stronger self-understanding. Then the individual is better able to experience and express compassion and empathy for others.

Self-Governance

Destructive behaviors sometimes occur when differences trigger powerful feelings. Affirmative introspection helps people understand why differ-

ences trigger energetic reactions. Self-governance is the process of learning to make choices about channeling that energy into positive and productive or negative and counterproductive behaviors. This ability to manage the energy that emotional reactions generate and channel that energy in a constructive direction is the essence of self-governance. Self-governance involves gaining mastery over the feelings that differences evoke by being able to deal with the ambiguity that is part of a diverse environment, being flexible and adaptable in the face of change, and taking charge of the mental self-talk that challenging differences can trigger.

Cognitive therapies, including cognitive behavior therapy and rational emotive therapy (RET) (Ellis, 1973), offer a helpful process in gaining control over our inner dialogue. This self-control increases effectiveness in dealing with situations in which one might allow differences to trigger a reaction that hijacks one's emotional response. For example, Ellis and other practitioners of RET (also known as rational emotive behavior therapy) teach their clients a model based on the acronym ABC. The individual experiences an activating event, A; in the context of this article, this is a diversity difference among individuals. The emotional reaction to A, called the emotional consequence, C, appears to result from the activating event, A. However, RET teaches that the individual's belief, B, intervenes. The belief about the meaning and interpretation of A, the differences, actually leads to the emotional reaction, the emotional consequence, C: $A - B = C$. Some beliefs are rational, leading to appropriate emotional responses, such as fear of lightning from an

approaching thunderstorm. However, many beliefs are irrational B, which lead to inappropriate emotional reactions. Self-governance involves the ability to recognize when a difference combined with an irrational belief leads to a destructive emotional consequence. Psychologists frequently encounter a client whose difficulty with tolerating uncertainty creates much anxiety and promotes impulsive behavior. Research by Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson, and Sanford (1950) on the impact of intolerance shows the importance of overcoming rigid personality traits and the need for governing emotions in times of uncertainty. As individuals learn to better tolerate uncertainty and the unfamiliar, they increase their capacity for teamwork and creativity.

Intercultural Literacy

In a diverse world, understanding and managing oneself is not enough. Knowledge about other cultural norms helps people to figure out the reasons and meaning behind the behavior of others. This third aspect of the model, intercultural literacy, involves understanding others' cultural rules, norms, and values. This understanding is the first step toward empathy for others and the ability, metaphorically, to walk in their shoes. Further steps in the process encompass resisting the temptation to judge others' behavior according to one's own cultural standards and seeing the advantages and disadvantages of all cultural norms. This awareness and knowledge helps us to read the behavior of others more accurately so we can deal with them more effectively. Geert Hofstede's (1997) likening culture to "behavioral software" is a helpful

metaphor for understanding these variations. This "software" tells a person of one culture to interpret behavior one way and persons from another culture perhaps to interpret the same behavior quite differently.

Edward T. Hall (1969, 1973, 1989), an intercultural communications expert, categorized cultural norms into dimensions, such as individualistic-collectivistic and monochronic-polychronic. Viewing cultural norms as they fall along these dimensions helps develop a perspective that differences need not lead us to irrational evaluations of their goodness or badness but as indicators of richness and possibility.

Social Architecting

The fourth component of EID focuses on developing the ability to structure consciously and intentionally our relationships and environments so that they are productive, fulfilling, and satisfying for everyone. This aspect of EID encompasses the ability to serve as a cultural interpreter who helps others understand the different cultural norms and perspectives involved in situations. Social architecting includes effective communication to resolve conflicts in ways that are mutually satisfying to all parties and in the process to create welcoming, inclusive environments. These conditions empower individuals and groups to realize their creative potential, leveraging their diversity in the process.

Emotional Intelligence: Beyond the Individual

Success as an employee, manager, or in virtually any role in today's diverse world requires us to

develop competence in these four dimensions of the EID model. The reward is enrichment of life and belonging to more highly functioning teams. While the EID model has clear application and relevance for individuals, the same concepts apply to teams and organizations. Managers and team members alike share responsibility for building emotionally intelligent team environments. Leaders at the strategic level can create the benefits of leveraging diverse workforces by implementing policies and systems that reinforce and support the development and maintenance of emotionally intelligent organizations. The conceptual underpinning of social architecting comes in large part from the vast body of research on effective group problem solving and decision making. The common theme in the literature is that effective groups meet two needs for their members: ego and affiliation. Abraham Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of human needs, especially the needs for esteem and belonging, supports these findings. His theory of human motivation is more than 65 years old, yet it is as valid and reliable a predictor for success today as it has always been. While individual application has been discussed in the earlier sections of this article, relevance at the team and organizational levels is discussed in this section. Table 1 provides a summary of how the EID model applies at all three levels: individual, team, and organizational.

Team Level

Dealing with differences often elicits interest and curiosity and offers the promise of creativity. The difficulty comes when team members from different backgrounds, value sets, and cultural styles have to work together and deal with the

Table 1
Key Aspects of EID Model for Individuals, Team, and Organizations

Individual level	Developing the emotional intelligence competencies and skills individuals need to function effectively in a diverse world
Team level	Developing the norms and skills needed to create emotionally intelligent teams that are inclusive and embrace diversity
Organizational level	Enabling teams to use diversity to create synergistic solutions within an engaging and respectful environment Identifying the principles, norms, and values that need to be developed, implemented, and communicated in order to become a truly inclusive organization with a culture of respect that succeeds in a diverse world

conflicting aspects of these differences. In the process of making changes and implementing policies and procedures, they sometimes find that real differences are no longer so full of promise. They are just difficult. In these situations, EID can be of immense help for teams that want to achieve productivity, meaning, and joy in this complex, pluralistic world. EID provides an approach to creating and reinforcing healthy norms, which empowers teams to perform closer to their potential. Applying EID at the team level requires developing skills, competencies, and norms for creating teams that embrace differences in style, priorities, viewpoints, motivations, and talents.

Teams begin by establishing ground rules about how to give feedback in constructive ways. Perhaps team members agree that any feedback

must be about a behavior that can be changed and presented through the “I” message technique that guarantees less judgment and defensiveness (e.g., “I get irritated when I am interrupted as I try to present my ideas”). Perhaps the team designs fun but direct ways to give people feedback when old habits are hard to break. For example, in one group, team members yelled, “Boomerang,” when norms were violated. That comment signaled that the behavior could come around to kick you if you keep it up. On another team, members exclaimed, “Oil,” when someone was repeating feedback over and over again. The metaphor the team created was based on the feeling that a member was drilling the same hole again and again, to the point he or she had drilled so far as to strike oil. These are light, easy ways to help break bad habits.

Through intentionally focusing on creating and reinforcing such norms, EID helps team members manage potentially disruptive experiences in a productive way and use conflict as a stimulus for creativity and growth.

Kelley and Littman (2001) describe how diverse teams innovate more quickly and with more creativity. Kelley founded an industrial design firm renowned for its ability to design imaginative breakthrough solutions in amazingly short time frames. One key to their success is that the firm deliberately includes in its diverse teams people with widely varying backgrounds in terms of not only demographics like gender, age, race, culture, and experience, but also work experience, educational level, and educational background. For example, a team might include engineers, elementary school teachers, project managers, and philosophers. Their team leaders manage the

team’s work by applying well-established rules for brainstorming, prototyping, and evolving solution designs.

Organizational Level

At the organizational level, creating an emotionally intelligent work environment involves creating a balance between having shared organizational values and honoring individual uniqueness. How does the organization manage work life/balance needs with productivity goals and deadlines? How can leaders address employees’ needs for honest, direct communication and transparency in a climate of rapid change? How does the organization live its stated values of integrity and honesty?

Periods of high stress levels in the organization also provide opportunities to demonstrate EI. For instance, during a difficult period involving layoffs, clarity and transparency go a long way toward demonstrating honesty. Another example is an organization that rewards rational risk taking regardless of the outcome, with the victory not in the result but in taking the risk itself. These issues require feedback, good dialogue, conversations without retribution, and the desire for the organization to value time spent in soft skills so people can communicate without hurting each other.

EID in organizations is focused on helping employees achieve a joyful, productive, and meaningful life so they give their best to the organization, customers, and communities. A workplace governed by intentional acts enriched by purpose, contributions, and meaning is the dream. EID can contribute to making it a reality. Table 2 provides a summary of norms and behaviors designed to achieve these ends. The table offers examples of

actions that, if taken at an individual, team, and organizational level, can enable employees to create a productive, meaningful, and joyous work life. These are examples of some of the possibilities.

Each organization needs to establish the behaviors that it believes will enable it to achieve an organizational culture rich in purpose, remarkable in accomplishment, high in meaning, and

strong in mutual respect. Such cultures foster an environment in which individuals and teams build and maintain strong relationships, in the process creating networks of connections across the organization that get results. Ultimately they engage employees and managers who feel a sense of belonging to something greater than themselves and the joy of finding meaning in their work. ♦

Table 2
Examples of Norms and Behaviors to Foster Organizations Operating in the EID Model

EID Model	Individual	Team	Organization
Affirmative introspection	Honest self-reflection on feelings, beliefs, and reactions to differences. Express thoughts and feelings to teammates with tact. Practice self-awareness of hot buttons and assumptions. Respond to a strong reaction to another's behavior by seeking information in a nonjudgmental way.	Build in time on a routine basis to assess team effectiveness to give and receive feedback. Pay as much attention to process as to content and dialogue. Establish a norm that the team discusses team dynamics and processes in a nonjudgmental, objective way.	Tell inspirational stories about the organization's heritage and heroes. Have conversations about whether proposed actions and policies are consistent with the organization's values and culture.
Self-governance	Seek chances to work in new and unfamiliar environments. Avoid finger-pointing and blaming. Seek and accept openly others' feedback and opinions while self-managing the potential to become defensive. Develop ways to cope with ambiguity. Train the self to respond to differences with curiosity by asking questions rather than getting defensive. Manage frustration and anger by reframing situations and changing self-talk messages.	Set ground rules for operating and communicating among group members. Define the work climate the team wants to have through a discussion among the group members. Avoid polarized, either-or thinking by always creating more than two options. Help people navigate the process of change by identifying and focusing on the controllable aspects.	Acknowledge gains, losses, and opportunities in changes. Make fun a priority in the culture. Build in fun ways to enhance the enjoyment of work and alleviate stress.

Table 2 (Continued)

EID Model	Individual	Team	Organization
Intercultural literacy	<p>Assume that difficult behavior takes place for a reason, and find out the reason.</p> <p>Build relationships with those who are different in order to expand mutual understanding.</p> <p>Assume others act with positive intent.</p> <p>Avoid negative attributions about others' behavior.</p> <p>Invest time in understanding your own assumptions about others' behaviors as a way to improve relationships.</p>	<p>Respect, understand, and value differences in individual styles and perspectives.</p> <p>Take time to hear and understand all views.</p> <p>As a team, identify concrete behaviors that are indicators of trust and integrity.</p> <p>Identify and share hot buttons for team members.</p>	<p>Solicit information about the needs and concerns of employees from all parts of the organization.</p> <p>Create opportunities for cross-training. Clarify the behaviors and results for which employees will be held accountable.</p> <p>Develop creative, nonthreatening approaches and language that make discussing difficult issues easier.</p>
Social architecting	<p>Seek resolutions that are mutually satisfactory.</p> <p>Spend time building relationships with people who exemplify the differences in a diverse workforce.</p> <p>Invite those who are quiet and less verbal to express their ideas and opinions.</p> <p>Validate colleagues and their contributions.</p> <p>Express gratitude to others on a regular basis.</p>	<p>Check in with people at the beginning of a meeting to find out how everyone is doing. Make the check-in a regular part of the meetings.</p> <p>Invite other departments to your team meetings and attend theirs.</p> <p>Ask internal client departments for feedback.</p> <p>Offer alternatives when existing processes are not working.</p> <p>Invite all participants to engage in the design of processes that involve the most reluctant members.</p> <p>Make certain that potentially divisive issues are talked about in a constructive dialogue.</p>	<p>Affirm a respectful workplace by setting organizational ground rules that foster respect, such as, "Each employee is safe from ridicule and humiliation."</p> <p>Create forums for interdepartmental communication and problem solving.</p> <p>Create vehicles for networking and communicating across the organization.</p> <p>Create roles such as ombudsperson or diversity director, and give them power and resources.</p>

References

Adorno, T. W., Frenkel-Brunswik, E., Levinson, D., & Sanford, R. (1950). *The authoritarian personality*. New York: HarperCollins.

Bar-On, R., & Parker, J. (Eds.). (2000). *The handbook of emotional intelligence: Theory, development, assessment, and application at home, school and in the workplace*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

- Branden, N. (1994). *The six pillars of self-esteem*. New York: Bantam.
- Ellis, A. (1973.) *Humanistic psychotherapy: The rational-emotive approach*. New York: Julian Press.
- Gardenswartz, L., Cherbosque, J., & Rowe, A. (2008). *Emotional intelligence for managing results in a diverse world*. Mountain View, CA: Davies-Black.
- Gardenswartz, L., & Rowe, A. (1994). *Diverse teams at work*. Chicago: Irwin.
- Goleman, D. (1995). *Emotional intelligence: Why it can matter more than IQ*. New York: Bantam.
- Goleman, D., Boyatzis, R., & McKee, A. (2004). *Primal leadership: Learning to lead with emotional intelligence*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press.
- Hall, E. (1969). *The hidden dimension*. New York: Doubleday.
- Hall, E. (1973). *The silent language*. New York: Doubleday.
- Hall, E. (1989). *Beyond culture*. New York: Doubleday.
- Hofstede, G. (1997). *Cultures and organizations: Software of the mind*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Kelly, T., & Littman, J. (2001). *The art of innovation: Lessons in creativity from IDEO, America's leading design firm*. New York: Broadway Business.
- Loden, M., & Rosener, J. (1991). *Workforce America!* Burr Ridge, IL: Business One Irwin.
- Maslow, A. (1943). A theory of human motivation. *Psychological Review*, 50(4), 370–396.
-
- Lee Gardenswartz, Jorge Cherbosque, and Anita Rowe are partners in the Emotional Intelligence and Diversity Institute, Los Angeles, and the authors of Emotional Intelligence for Managing Results in a Diverse World. They provide training and consulting to organizations such as UCLA, Harvard Medical School, Walt Disney, and Cox Communication.*