Chapter One — My Personal Learning Process And Journey Have Helped Me Understand Both Instincts And Myself

My learning process about how groups of people interact with one another has been a fascinating journey — and it gets more interesting for me every single day and year.

I started my personal learning process about all things relevant to all of the key sets of intergroup interaction issues as a white guy from a very small town in Northern Minnesota.

Our small town was surrounded by second growth forests — primarily jack pines, popple trees, and scrub oak. Those trees offered their own semi-lush Eden as protection, shelter, and habitat to a wide variety of wildlife. They also offered fairly meager economic sustenance to a relatively small number of people who had decided to make their living running tiny mixed crop farms and from doing low income, physically draining, and sometimes physically damaging and dangerous logging of the local trees.

Our trees become paper rather than furniture or roofs.

I learned initially about several relevant differences between groups of people fairly early in my life in that small town.

The differences that existed between those particular groups of people who lived — at that point in time in those jack pine forests — seem minor and inconsequential when viewed from a distance, but those differences among those people were a looming fact of life for me in my most formative years.

That very small town actually had very real internal ethnic divisions between the people whose families had immigrated from Finland and the people whose families had immigrated to that piece of Minnesota turf from other Scandinavian or European countries.

“Finn town” was a fairly clearly defined part of town when I was a child. The people with Finnish ancestors were concentrated in several neighborhoods. Their houses often had saunas attached. I used to play poker in those saunas and I would periodically also get very clean in those same saunas.

Some very clear us/them thinking and some very distinct us/them behaviors were triggered by the specific categories of ethnic groupings that existed in that small town. There were several Lutheran churches, for example. They were divided by tribe. The Finnish people in town tended to go to different Lutheran churches from the non-Finns.

The differences in denomination between those churches seemed to matter quite a bit to a number of the folks who lived in that town. Church sect differences, I could see in those early years, tended to trigger a clear sense of “Us” or “Them” for the folks who chose to be part of each sect.

The truth was — as usually happens for religious alignments — people actually did not choose their sect. People were born into their sect. My own grandparents were founding members of the Norwegian Lutheran church in that town — and I would have been considered a traitor to my family “us” if I had somehow chosen to spend my Sunday mornings at the Finnish Lutheran church.

That choice was inconceivable to me. It never occurred to me to even consider it. We all know exactly where we belonged when it came time to pray and that was exactly where we all stayed.

Martin Luther King once said that the most segregated hour in America occurs just before noon every Sunday morning.

That segregation clearly happened on Sunday morning in Menahga.

We had more than religion to shape our intergroup division. Many of my fellow students spoke Finnish as their primary language when they

reached first grade. Some of my fellow students had a clear Finnish accent for their English that lasted for many years.

Some of the Finnish families would not allow their daughters to date non-Finns. Or at least, that's what a couple of the daughters from those families told me at that time.

There was no open hostility between the groups — but there were clear intergroup divisions in several aspects of local life. Our local political candidates generally had very clear ethnic patterns in their voting support.

My maternal grandfather was mayor of that town twice and my own father was mayor three times. I don't believe my father had more than 10 percent of the Finnish votes on his first election. It was a very close election. They actually had a court-supervised recount for that particular election.

My father had high levels of support from all groups in town by his final term in office — but that very first vote was very clearly divided along ethnic lines. The other candidate in that first election was a full-blooded Finn and he campaigned very explicitly and openly for the Finn vote.

We also had a very small number of Native Americans in town. We lived relatively close to a couple of large tribal reservations — so driving to and through those reservations and having some interactions with some of

the people who lived there was also a part of my growing up set of life experiences.

We were also slightly more than an hour away from some significant migrant farm worker encampments in the Red River Valley. The workers in those camps came almost entirely from Mexico.

I did drive by those sites and I saw the people who lived in them, but I had no actual encounters of any kind at any time with any of the people who lived and worked in any of those sites. Not one interaction. Zero. They were like people from a different planet to me in my growing up years.

I saw the tiny cabins in rows on the narrow dirt roads by the sugar beet fields and I had no sense at any level about who lived there or what their lives were all about.

One of my cousins worked one summer in the beet fields alongside and with the migrant workers who lived in those tiny cabins. He told us that it was the hardest work he ever did in his life.

That job made him easily the person in the family with the most "diversity" experience. His friends at school made disparaging comments to him about his experiences. They made negative comments to him about his

new friends in the beet fields — so he stopped sharing those stories with them or with anyone else after he returned to school that fall.

He later became a full sergeant major in the U.S. Marines and he did a number of things to help improve some aspects of Marine Corp. ethnicity and Marine Corp. racial interactions before his untimely death from a fairly rare cancer. It occurred to me at the time of his death that his exposure to the chemicals in those sugar beet fields might have planted a seed for that cancer. Those were not safe working conditions and he died relatively young.

As a Northern Minnesota White guy, my own exposure to African Americans, prior to my college years, came entirely from television. There were no Black people in our town or in our county.

I was very pro-civil rights, however. I did see extensive television footage of the very ugly things that were happening to the civil rights efforts and to the civil rights workers in some of our Southern states, and I had great sympathy for the protestors.

But I had no direct contact with anyone Black until I got to college. I then did have some Black friends in the small Christian college I attended — so my exposure to racial diversity increased a little.

I had a day job as a newspaper reporter for the local daily newspaper during my college years. I was a full-time student and I was simultaneously a full-time newspaper reporter. I loved both roles.

I have never entirely given up my sense of being, at heart, a journalist who is functionally embedded in my own daily career and life.

I once wrote an article for that local newspaper about the very dysfunctional prejudice that some of my Black friends from school had experienced when they tried to rent apartments in that town.

I actually did an experiment and I had a White student go to some houses where my Black college friends had been told that the apartments had all been rented. The White students were told a completely different story from the same renter and the White students were actually offered the rooms.

Several people were angry that I wrote the article. A couple of people told me that I had invented the story and I was told with great energy by a couple of people at the newspaper that no one was actually racially prejudiced in those ways in that particular town.

The experiences I had with that small set of discrimination issues reinforced and reaffirmed what I had seen on the national television news

shows. I was sad for my friends who were denied rooms and I was more than a little angry about their treatment. My friends were unable to rent a place to live off campus and had to sleep in the freshman dorms at the college for four years.

It made me sad and angry to see how badly my friends were treated relative to a very basic and simple fact of life like finding a place to sleep, and it made me even sadder and angrier to hear from my Black friends that they were entirely used to being treated in that way.

They, of course, were not surprised at that experience. They told me they had expected the rejection. That kind of experience was, they said, a routine fact of life in their world.

Hearing that from my friends made me a little crazy in an angry way. That made the discrimination experience very real. It's always easier to understand those kinds of issues at a human level. It is significantly easier to put them into human context as a real and important behavior when they happen directly to a personal friend.

The Twin Cities Were More Diverse

When I moved from that small college town in Northern Minnesota down south to the metropolitan Twin Cities area to work, I found myself in a

much more diverse setting. Minneapolis/St. Paul had significantly more diversity than Fargo/Moorhead. As a new Twin City resident, I ended up with some Black friends, some Asian co-workers and friends, and a growing exposure to various minority groups.

I did some work with the community clinics of St. Paul, but I did that work at a support and governance level and not in a direct caregiving job. The African American woman who ran the St. Paul Model Cities community clinics later became one of my best friends, and I still mourn her loss to cancer before her time.

One of the greatest honors of my life — one that I still treasure deeply — was to be asked by her to do her eulogy at her funeral. Timothy Vann was my mentor, my counselor, my coach, my inspiration, my hero, and my friend — and I still have a religious gift — a fairly large and lovely statue of St. Joseph — that Mrs. Vann gave me in passing, sitting in a prominent place in my living room.

I did not do justice to her in her eulogy. I did not come close. She deserved better. But I still feel grateful and deeply honored that she asked me to do that eulogy for her.

So I did have some experience relative to some issues of diversity and to both positive and negative intergroup and interracial interactions in the first decades of my life. I was pro-civil rights and I was an activist for integration issues at several levels, but I held those beliefs from the perspective of a White guy who had basically only directly experienced Minnesota in the days before Minnesota had any significant diversity.

I Had The Chance To Build A Health Plan In Jamaica

Then, in mid-career, I had an amazing opportunity to see a much wider range of intergroup issues from a much richer and more direct perspective. I was blessed with a marvelous opportunity to experience and learn. My first major and very direct personal exposure to many people from a wider set of ethnic and racial compositions came when I had a chance to start a health plan in Jamaica.

The Minnesota health care company that I was the CEO of at the time was given a chance to build a health plan in Jamaica — and I was a lead person from our team who was able to go there to do that work.

I gave myself that assignment. I went to Jamaica — met with the local people relevant to my work — and I designed and helped build a health plan that provided care and coverage to local Jamaicans.

That plan had major support from the labor unions of Jamaica — so I had a chance to meet the labor leadership in Jamaica as well as the local insurance business people, the local caregivers, and some members of the government.

That was a remarkable learning experience. I went from being in Minnesota rooms with few or no black faces most of the time into being the only white face in the room most of the time. I was clearly the minority person in almost all of my Jamaican settings.

I helped start a health plan in Jamaica that had almost all black doctors and nurses and that also had a board of directors that did not have a white face on it. There were a couple of Hispanic and Asian doctors and business leaders in that setting, but white, as a descriptor for any person in the room, was very often limited to just me.

I Learned The Stress Of Being The Only "Us"

I learned a lot. I was deeply blessed to have had that experience at many levels. I learned in those settings in Jamaica how stressful it can be at both a subconscious and a conscious level when we are the only anything in a room full of people from another group.

That was an important learning experience all by itself. As a White majority group member functioning entirely in groups of Minnesota White people, I had no idea before going to Jamaica that being alone as a different type of person in any setting could generate subconscious tension and could trigger constant mild stress and I did not learn that particular very important reality about intergroup interactions until I was in a setting where the only person of my own type in a group in a room was me.

That was truly a golden learning experience. In reality, I could not have been in a safer environment. I was not at risk. I had a great job and I had a solid interaction level with my co-workers. I had great support. My co-workers in Jamaica all seemed to like me, and I believe we did really good work together.

But I often had a strong sense of being surrounded by “them” because I was, in fact, the outlier person most of the time in most of the work settings and in almost all of the after work settings.

That was a great opportunity for very personal learning for me at multiple levels. One of the levels took me entirely by surprise.

One night, at a very local reggae event down by the waterfront in the city of Kingston, I looked around me at a sea of entirely black faces and I

had a panic attack at a very primal and personal level that literally and physically dropped me to my knees.

There was no overt threat and there was no functional reason for me to panic. I was not threatened in any way. But I suddenly had a sense of being completely and entirely surrounded by “Them” and I melted.

Back in my own bed later that night, I had a very clear and explicit flashback on what it felt like to be entirely surrounded by “Them” and I realized how primal, basic, pure, and entirely instinctive my panic had been.

I then started noticing which daytime settings increased my levels of stress and anxiety. I began to understand that being a minority in any setting had levels of instinct triggered stress that I had never suspected.

I was suddenly both very sympathetic and highly empathetic for all of the African Americans who had been the only black faces in all of those overwhelmingly White meetings that I had been part of back in Minnesota.

I had never personally felt interethnic stress or even interethnic tension or discomfort in any of those slightly multi-ethnic Minnesota meetings, but that was obviously because I was part of the absolute and clear majority in each setting. I now had the insight at a very personal level that

the African American people in those Minnesota meetings might well have felt very differently about each of those meetings and settings.

That suspicion was correct. When I talked very explicitly and extensively to multiple people who have been situational minority people in various settings about that specific situational minority stress issue since that time, I have confirmed in many conversations that those feelings are in fact often felt by people who are the situational minorities in any multi-group settings.

My supposition on that night in Jamaica about the universality of that deeply embedded and very primal reaction that we each can have at an instinctive level whenever we are a situational minority was true. I learned that it is common to feel some level of stress anytime any of us are surrounded by "Them." I also learned that under some circumstances, the basic discomfort can accelerates into actual panic as a pure situation reaction.

I now know that it is true that people in any setting who are the clear minority of any kind in a given setting often have a very similar sense of group-linked discomfort and stress.

I did have a somewhat similar and equally primal feeling when I was wind boarding a couple of miles out to sea in the blue water area of the ocean off Jamaica and what appeared to be a giant squid — many times larger than my wind-board — partially surfaced and rolled a vast expanse of smooth dark skin on the surface of the water a few feet away from my board.

I melted again — dropping to my knees first and then only able to lie down on the board until the beast left and I regained slow control over my limbs. That panic was equivalently instinctive. It took away my ability to function and I had to slowly and carefully recover at an emotional and mental level before I could move either my arms or my legs.

Both of those experiences triggered feelings that were equally primal and equally pure.

I did not have anything resembling that level of panic attack in any of my various business meetings in Jamaica — but I did have a strong sense of stress and basic discomfort in some non-business settings where I was clearly the situational minority.

When I asked people about that set of reactions, many other people from several groups have told me about having similar intergroup stress feelings in similar intergroup situations.

I learned from all of those conversations with other people about those issues and feelings and from my own personal experiences that the normal consequence of being a minority in any setting is often a level of instinctive stress.

People In the Majority Often Have No Realization Of The Situational Stress

I have learned through my conversations with many people and from direct observation in a number of settings that it is also true that whoever is in the majority status in those exact same settings often has no clue at any level that anyone who is in that room with them is currently feeling that level of situational stress. Those feelings can be very powerful to the person who is feeling them and they tend to be entirely invisible to everyone else in the setting.

I personally had no idea those sets of reactions existed — and I might personally never have learned that fact and experienced that reality about situational minority stress — had I not gone to Jamaica to start that health plan.

It was much easier to explain and discuss that situational stress later in talking to other people about it because I had actually experienced it myself.

Reading about a sense or reading about a feeling or reading about an instinctive reaction can be informative. Actually having and personally experiencing an instinctive emotion or instinctive feeling can be insight provoking and educational at higher and more meaningful levels.

My initial response when I recognized those patterns about feeling stress at being in a minority situation in a setting to be true was to be sad about the existence of that set of feelings and those levels of intergroup stress. Our primary civil rights goal and strategy as a country at that point in our history was integration. We wanted to eliminate segregation. We wanted to replace segregation with integration.

Our primary and explicit civil rights objective at that point in time was to integrate in every place and every setting where integration was possible.

That is a good goal, but it became clear to me in Jamaica that our efforts to integrate various work places and schools and multiple other settings would always carry the burden of having whoever the minority person is in each setting feeling that level of discomfort and feeling a level of stress at an instinctive level for simply being in that situational minority status whenever that particular situation exists.

Through experimentation and through a couple of pilot efforts done with myself and other people, I have learned that people who are going into that kind of intergroup setting as a minority participant can very often significantly reduce that level of subconscious stress when we understand that instinct-triggered stress to be what it is and when we cognitively, intellectually, and practically recognize that the intergroup situation we are in is actually safe.

We Can Mitigate That Reaction When We Know Its Origin

We can mitigate that particular discomfort when we know its origin. But my experience has been that we can never eliminate entirely our instinctive reaction to being in a situational minority status.

Interestingly, I felt that same set of primal reactions again one time at an extreme level several years later when I was working to put health plans into Uganda. I had a moment of pure situational panic one night in a street market near Kampala with only open fires for lighting and with many people milling around on the streets who were all very obviously Ugandan.

Panic waves rolled momentarily in my brain. My knees were again unstable.

The good news was that I recovered much more quickly in Uganda because I knew what the trigger was for my panic and I was able to get through it with less negative impact. I do not think the people around me in Uganda knew or even suspected that I had panicked.

I had a strong sense again, however, that it is a very useful thing to understand those instinctive reactions. It also made me sad that the perception and the sense of being a situational minority can create so much situational stress for people everywhere in settings that really are safe and non-threatening.

Instinctive Stress About Being Surrounded Can Help Survival

I now have mixed emotions about those feelings. I have since figured out that the instinctive stress that is triggered in all of us by being surrounded by "Them" can actually be a very good survival instinct for people to have. As I have looked at a wide set of behaviors in multiple settings, I have since come to realize and to appreciate the sad but realistic fact that those instinctive reactions actually continue to have real survival value for many people in the real world today.

That panic instinct and that sense of stress that is triggered when we are surrounded by "Them" are both intended to cause us to want to be in

different group settings than the one we are in when we are surrounded by "Them."

That stress is clearly intended to cause us to reduce stress by doing what we need to do to not be surrounded by "them." It is an ancient instinct, but it does have very real and immediate impact for people in many very modern settings today.

Last year, in the Congo, a number of people were killed brutally by machetes because their accent was from a different tribe than the men who had the big knives and who used them to do damage in that setting. That difference in how those people sounded with just the differences in their clan dialect was enough to get those particular people injured, mutilated, and then killed.

Those people in that very current inter-ethnic setting in the world today would have been much better off somehow following that particular stress instinct to its extreme level and entirely avoiding "Them."

Because so many people have their own negative instincts in gear to treat people differently when we perceive people to be a them instead of us — and because some people feel no guilt in damaging people and doing evil

things to whoever they perceive to be “Them” — it can be a good thing for each of us to avoid people who see us as “Them.”

That stress creating instinct to not ever be a situational minority actually often points people in many settings in the world even today in a safer direction. That is sad but true.

Jamaica And Uganda Gave Me Great Learning Experiences

My international learning experiences have been fascinating learning opportunities for multiple levels of us/them issues. Jamaica and Uganda both gave me great personal and direct learning opportunities relative to those packages of behaviors.

I have worked in several other countries as well. Working with people in Wales and Spain also gave me additional sets of intergroup experiences and intergroup insights.

In addition to being the CEO of several health plans and health systems in the U.S. over the past three decades, I have had the opportunity to consult with and coach health plan people in more than a dozen other countries and I have helped get actual health plans functionally started in several countries.

I did on-the-ground work to help care systems in Uganda, Jamaica, Great Britain, and Spain. I helped design and create plans for both Chile and Nigeria. I served as the chair of the International Federation of Health Funds for nearly a decade — and I worked with health systems and health plans from literally dozens of countries in that role.

I had the good fortune to be a small town boy from Northern Minnesota who was blessed with the opportunity to do front level work with local people in local health care and community settings around the world. I used that opportunity to study the intergroup interactions of people in each and every setting where I did my health care work.

My job has allowed me to travel to multiple countries and to interact as co-workers with people in those settings. As I have been looking at all of the intergroup issues I could find in all of those settings over the past couple of decades, I have found those same patterns of instinctive behaviors actually do exist everywhere.

My basic beliefs about those instinctive intergroup behaviors and their impacts on our lives have been reinforced with great consistency by each and every international project and situation that I have had a chance to be involved in.

The Russians Would Not Take Direction From A "Black"

One of those experiences happened in Moscow more than 25 years ago when I was giving some advice about health care structure and laws to a working committee of the Russian Dumas. The government of that country was dropping the communist economic model and was putting together laws to help create private health care delivery approaches in that country.

Because I had run both health plans and care systems in the U.S. and because I had also chaired what was then the national trade association for all American health plans, the Russian Government had asked me to go Moscow and help them design their future health care system. I was asked to help them write laws that would guide and govern their new economic system for health care. I loved the project.

Private health care had been illegal in Russia before that time. The president of the country wanted the country to have laws that would legalize private health care delivery and that would allow Russians to also set up private systems that could insure and pay for that care.

So the parliament was writing those laws for him and the drafters of the legislation wanted outside help from someone who had been involved in writing and using those kinds of laws in another country.

My co-consultants for the official Dumas Health Care Committee that was focused as a legislative committee on that project included the then current head of the British Health Service — the NHS — and an old friend of mine from Santiago, Chile who then ran the largest health plan in Chile. I had actually helped co-design elements of his plan in Chile in earlier times.

"We Don't Take Work Directions From A Black"

In any case, I had the chance to work in Moscow on that project and our support team for that effort included some local Russians who spoke English well.

What happened with my co-workers should not have surprised me. I knew even then that Russia had a number of dozen current ethnic hot spots and I knew that Russia had many more historic ethnic hot spots. So I know that ethnic and intergroup interaction issues were extremely relevant in that country.

I told the Russians in my work group as we left a meeting that I had been particularly impressed by a briefing I had received from a woman doctor earlier in the day, and I suggested to the Russians that she was probably a good leader for their efforts. One of the Russians grunted and

said — “We could never follow her. She is a black. None of us in our office would ever follow her anywhere.”

I was shocked. The term Black, in particular, took me entirely by surprise. She was one of the whitest people I had ever seen. Literally starkly white. I had actually wondered earlier in the day when she gave us the briefing if her extremely white skin could handle either sunburn or a tan. Black was not a descriptive term I would have used for her.

So I asked one of the Americans later what that exchange had been all about. The American told me she was from a local ethnic minority that they generically labeled as black and that the ethnic Russians in that setting would not accept her in any supervisory role. Her career in Moscow was stalled — basically frozen — but her English was remarkably good. So they had her brief our group on some health care related legislative issues.

The ethnic Russians at that point in time would not, however, be willing to have her as a leader or even as a full colleague because they perceived her to be from an “inferior” ethnic group. Their open contempt for her group surprised me… in part because I still had a vague sense in my own head that we needed a difference in both race and ethnicity to fully trigger that full set of intensely prejudicial intergroup instincts — and that was clearly a wrong assumption.

What also struck me at the time about the refusal of the people in that group to work with her because she was Black was that I had heard almost the same exact language in Minnesota 20 years earlier when I had hired a first ever African American woman into a professional analyst job at my place of employment — and one of the clerical people I worked with on my team said to me with great concern in the privacy of my office — "I can't take work instructions from a black."

In that Minnesota setting, I said — "Hey, give it a shot. Get to know her. It will be fine."

My advice to our clerk in Minnesota was both accurate and right. When our current employee got to know our new hire, through working directly with her — it was in fact — just fine. I think they actually became friends. That friendship between the two of them would have been logical because the truth was that they were both good people.

But the initial response by that White clerk in Minnesota to having an African American woman in a professional job and giving work direction to people in our particular work setting was resistance and some anger.

The White clerk told me at the time that her mother would not respect her if her mother ever learned that she was being given work direction from

a “Negro.” I told her that her mother didn’t need to hear about it until she was ready to share that information with her.

I was surprised two decades later to hear the same language and same concern expressed in Moscow about a White woman who was officially, to the ethnic Russians, Black.

I now know that Russia has more than 100 minority ethnic groups who all have their own language and cultures and who all tend to have their own arrays of negative intergroup interactions with the majority Russian Ethnic group. But at that point in my learning process, I thought that all Russians were essentially one group and believed that Russia was a much more ethnically monolithic country than it actually is.

We Needed To Work With Each Tribe

In each of the settings around the world where I have had a chance to work with local health care teams to help set up and build local care systems, I have seen the impact of intergroup instincts influencing what we did and how we did it.

In Uganda, after we put the first micro health plans into villages that were part of one local tribe, we were told that we needed to set up the next plans in villages that were the home sites for at least one other tribe or we

would be perceived to be tied to the first tribe in a way that would cause us not to be trusted or supported in the future by the people from other Ugandan tribes.

That also took me totally by surprise. I had also been thinking in a basically uninformed way that all Ugandans were Ugandans and that anything we did anywhere in the country would count as something we had done everywhere in the country. I was totally wrong.

There are actually 40 key tribes in Uganda. There are a couple of primary language groups. We needed to reflect that reality by providing support in impartial ways to people from multiple tribes and each of the key language groups in order to be trusted across tribal lines.

I then had a couple of settings where I gave speeches to community gatherings to explain what we were trying to accomplish and I had translators from two other languages standing next to me — each repeating what I had said in their own language.

That double translation process generally made for very long and slow presentations. I sometimes forget the first part of my own point by the time the two translators had each stopped talking and had both turned back to me for my next point.

I learned to speak in very brief sentences to keep the flow going in all three languages.

Standing under a canvass shade a few miles from the actual equator and speaking slowly to a crowd of local residents using double translators for my speech was a good reinforcement about the issues of intergroup relevancy in that setting. It also brought back some memories of my multi-lingual youth.

In the small town in Northern Minnesota where I grew up, there had been a number of immigrants from Finland who had never learned to be fluent in English. Talking to those people sometimes also required an interpreter and that process also required speaking very slowly to make sure that whatever I needed interpreted was clearly communicated in the translation process.

I worked as a clerk in the local bank, and that experience gave me my first small, but useful, opportunity to work with people who did not speak my language, but who I needed to serve as customers and clients.

I did have a flash back to that experience in that bank when I was at the microphone in Uganda trying to persuade a room full of people to agree with our approach and to become members of our local health plan.

My Jobs Have Been Times Of Learning

I have been blessed with the opportunity to do interesting work in a wide range of settings that all have been useful in giving me a context for understanding intergroup interactions.

As a life long believer in both continuous learning and continuous improvement, I have been able to turn those job opportunities into times of exploration and learning.

Initially, my goal in those work settings tended not to learn as much as it was to simply survive and succeed.

I believe that my success in some of the foreign settings that I worked with later was made possible by the fact that I had learned, in Minnesota, in fairly complex organizational settings to very intentionally create levels of intergroup trust, intergroup interaction, and intergroup communications for our initial work settings.

Those complex work settings in our country shaped my own learning in some clear and useful ways and I found the ability to create trust and a sense of alignment was useful in every setting.

When I talked to the people who were setting up those tiny co-ops in those small villages, I often opened by saying that my own organization

back in the U.S. was fairly large — but when it was formed, there were just a couple of people who had the cooperative spirit and they started with no resources, no funding, and a belief in the need for that care for their children that caused them to persevere in tough times.

I told the story that our very first employees in my own plan not only did not get paid, they actually brought light bulbs from home when the light bulbs in the office burned out. One took out a second mortgage on his house to pay the office rent!

My goal in telling those stories was to create a sense of "us" with the people in those villages — to say that we were very much alike in where we were and to say that they, too, could turn that tiny co-op into a success because true believers in Minnesota had also started with nothing but a similar dream and had succeeded in building the plan that I worked for.

That approach worked. I could see people nodding when I made those points and I could tell from their questions that they believed I was an "Us" who was there to help, and not a "Them" there to lecture or to endow.

People who perceived me, and our team to be an "us" helped solve the problems of each village in collaborative and creative ways. I don't think they would have done the same work with a "Them."

I learned a lot in each of those settings.