Structuring the Learning Environment

When designing your agenda, keep these four dimensions in mind. Each plays a critical role in enduring a productive training outcome.

1. **Climate**: This is the emotional tone of the session. Ideally, you’d like words such as open, tolerant, comfortable, and safe to describe the climate in your workshop. In fact, to have significant learning take place where people can admit their own biases and discuss assumptions or share management success and failures regarding diversity issues, you must have an open, tolerant and trusting climate. The use of small groups and interactive agendas helps create a trusting, open climate.

2. **Content**: The “what” of your meeting or session regarding diversity can be any number of things. Maybe you are giving an executive briefing so that top management understands the competitive / economic issues involved for your organization. On the other hand, you could be training employees about cultural awareness so that they can give diverse consumer base excellent service, or maybe you’re helping managers lean their own biases and assumptions impede hiring and promoting more diverse employees. Content can broadly fall under awareness, knowledge and skills.

3. **Process**: This aspect of the learning environment, the “how,” is critical in a cross-cultural environment because teaching methods vary by culture. Mainstream teaching within U.S. borders is highly interactive, two way, and Socratic in its use of questions. It draws the learner into the process. In much of the world, communication is one way with the teacher dispensing information. Interaction is minimal. How a participant is used to learning will significantly impact participation and results in a training session.

4. **Productivity**: The results are proverbial “proof in the pudding.” Effective results are achieved when the climate, content and process are well structured, managed, and implemented.