



# Navigating Power: Cross-Cultural Competence in Navajo Land

*Gelaye Debebe*

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Interactions among individuals representing culturally dissimilar and politically unequal groups are a ubiquitous feature of modern life. *Navigating Power: Cross-Cultural Competence in Navajo Land* by Gelaye Debebe is concerned with how these interactions affect task coordination in organizational settings. While much research has addressed the effect of cultural differences on these interactions, very little work has been done examining the role of political inequality.

Research suggests that cross-cultural breakdowns arise from differing cultural values and assumptions. Overcoming these breakdowns requires cross-cultural competence. This competence entails the ability to sustain a learner stance in the face of ambiguity, uncertainty, and negative or ambivalent emotional states. Cross-cultural learning is also viewed as a mutual process in which individuals examine their assumptions and jointly construct novel solutions. This book suggests that where power inequalities rooted in historical events are coupled with cultural differences, politically subordinate group members have a keen understanding of the dominant group culture. For them, the violation of historical sensitivities rooted in collective memories, and not cultural clash, are potent triggers for communication breakdown. Because of political inequality, mutuality is not a given in the learning process. Frequently there is a presumption that the knowledge and expertise of dominant group members is universal, better and legitimate. Faced with this situation, subordinate group members draw on power-based rules to interrupt the dominant postures of the politically powerful group.

To illustrate these dynamics, *Navigating Power* draws upon qualitative data from an inter-organizational relationship between an Anglo and Navajo organization. It focuses on two contrasting patterns of interaction, the first of which involves ignoring and suppressing context, and the second involves reading and writing context.

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