

**Leveling the playing field ©  
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As FIFA World Cup fever spreads around the globe, one can never fathom the myriad of obstacles surmounted by the teams in order to earn their spot. Granted, they are all national champions, but like everything in life, there is no such thing as a level playing field. As athletes, they all share certain traits such as discipline, goal-oriented, team spirit, loyalty and perseverance. However, depending on their country of origin, there is a great difference between the teams in training facilities, available budget and counseling services, to mention just a few, but they're enough to make a difference in the player's psyche.

As I watched the beginning of the World Cup last Friday, I was struck with the difference in attitude between the teams playing the opening game, Mexico and South Africa. As both teams waited in the tunnel leading for the moment they had to appear in the field, each had very different ways of dealing with stress, according to their own cultural background. The South African team was chanting hymns while the Mexican players cheered to off-set the peace the chanting afforded the South African players. I thought this interesting. As the match ended with a tie, I wondered how much the pregame psychological square-off had taken a toll on the Mexican players. Had the team prepared themselves to be the unwanted players in a strange land? Had they been prepared to navigate the local customs? Let's keep in mind that the games are being held in South Africa and soccer is an extremely competitive sport.

Being prepared or knowing about your opponent is a trait you'd like to explore not only in competitive sports, but in the workplace as well. As the world shrinks and opening new businesses abroad is part of everyday life, learning about the culture where your workforce comes from is not only desirable but a must in order to remain competitive in global markets.