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FOR MICHAEL BRIGHTON, there is a British “us” and a German “them.” For Dieter Wallach, the “us” is German and the “them” is British. For both, “us” is trustworthy and competent, “them” is neither. Before the merger, Royal Biscuit and Edeling were what psychologists call rival coalitions in a zero-sum game. Each was a highly cooperative group whose members coordinated their behavior to achieve a common goal: taking market share from “them.”

Is the difference in cultural norms causing the impasse? Or is Brighton’s and Wallach’s dislike of each other’s norms a result of their previous membership in rival coalitions?

In the wake of World War II, psychologists, like everyone else, were wondering how the Holocaust could have happened. Is there something fundamentally different about German people or German culture? Or is there something universal in human nature—something triggered by particular kinds of situations—that causes people to see the world as a zero-sum game between rival coalitions?

In the 1950s, psychologist Muzafer Sherif randomly divided an ethnically homogenous sample of 11-year-old boys into two groups at a camp. During the first week, neither group knew about the other. The boys hiked together and engaged in cooperative work and games with other group members. The groups were then introduced to each other and told they would be competing in a tournament. Within a day, the boys were beginning to sound like Brighton and Wallach. Each group was derogating the skills, character, and norms of the other and bragging about its own. Within two days, small-scale warfare

Why is this so? Natural selection equipped the human mind with a set of programs, each specialized for solving a problem faced by our hunter-gatherer ancestors. Our ancestors lived in bands; their lives depended on their ability to cooperate with group members and defend against rival groups. Neighboring bands were sometimes friendly but sometimes not. That which was most precious might be lost in a day—children killed, women taken as wives, foraging territories seized.

A fight is a conflict between two individuals, but a war is a conflict between two coalitions, each of which must coalesce and function as a cooperative unit. This poses specific problems, solved by specialized programs. To defend against a rival coalition or launch a raid, individuals must be able to do three things: coordinate their behavior with one another to achieve a common goal, share the resulting benefits with others who participated, and exclude free riders from these benefits. The common goal of competing against a rival coalition in a zero-sum game leads to cooperation among “us.” Resources? Use them to strengthen “us,” not “them.” Attitudes? Build cooperation among your coalition mates and consider their strengths in forming a plan of action—and don’t trust “them.” Brighton and Wallach were coalitional rivals until recently; their attitudes are a product of their us-versus-them psychology, not the result of a culture clash.

In uniting two coalitions, a leader has to define the merged organization’s common goals. Brighton, Wallach, and other executives will agree on methods once John Callaghan specifies which values the new leadership program should cultivate. And how can he get people to stop bickering? Instead of being content with Royal Edeling’s position as the world’s second-

largest food company, he should focus his employees on a new goal: beating the competition and becoming number one. As this happens, the distrust and resentment within the newly blended Royal Edeling will gradually subside. Rival “them”s will become a united “us.”

## Once the CEO focuses the merged company on a new goal, rival “them”s will become a united “us.”

broke out between the groups, complete with fistfights, commando raids on cabins, and improvised weapons. (Counselors intervened to protect the boys.) The results of studies like this were crystal clear: The programs that create an us-versus-them psychology are present in everyone and easy to activate.

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