

CASE STUDY (4)

DIVERSITY PHILOSOPHY – BUILDING ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE ACROSS DIFFERENT CULTURES

Consultant/case author:

Bjørn Z. Ekelund

Areas:

cross-cultural training, diversity management, innovation

Brief

This case is based on a team building session delivered twice a year to an organizational unit characterized by blend of an on-site Norwegian work culture and French organizational culture. Among the 50 members of this organizational unit, there were members from more than ten different countries. The organization's stakeholders wanted to establish a general diversity philosophy that would create a collective identification and commitment within the unit, as well as promote individual and team creativity to benefit organizational innovation.

Action

In order to address these challenges and goals related to such intercultural and diversified context, I designed and delivered a teambuilding session based on the Diversity Icebreaker. Following is the program of this session:

- 1) Presentation of the program and goals to the participants.
- 2) A classical Diversity Icebreaker (DI) seminar, where people fill in the questionnaire, work in groups, share their results between them and reflect collectively upon the learning points.
- 3) Short lecture by the consultant introducing culture as a concept, giving an overview of the challenges related to working together with people of different cultural values (the following central components were highlighted: unconsciousness / lack of awareness, language, emotions and identity, and even denial that culture is an important factor). During the lecture similarities between cultural dimensions and the DI dimensions were presented.
- 4) Discussing specific French-Norwegian differences, together with the participants, and comparing them to the rest of the world.
- 5) Group work: devising ways to solve these challenges.
Mono-cultural groups, drawing upon the learning points from the DI exercise, identify productive ways of working together across cultures and present them to the others.
- 6) A presentation of other ways of working positively with diversity:
 - a. acknowledging diversity as a strategy to socially unlock latent resources (organization culture - climate)
 - b. communication competence, Mapping - Bridging – Integrating model as an example of individual competence that stimulate innovation

Results:

This half or full day seminar was held every half a year for the newly recruited members of the organization. It became **a part of** the introductory program aimed at building the unit's own culture and developing a shared sense of "the unique way we do things around here", as an example of a Third Culture¹. The tricolour model was used to facilitate this process by providing an easy understandable framework of cognitive diversity, cutting across cultural differences, reflected in the language of Red, Blue and Green. This language, defined and acknowledged by the participants during the session, enables to understand and talk about others, including elaborating more complex types of diversity (here cultural diversity).

About the author:

Bjørn Z. Ekelund is a Norwegian organizational psychologist with 25 years of experience in managing small consultant companies, founder of Human Factors AS and creator as well as developer of the Diversity Icebreaker. In 2008 he was awarded with the prize "Best consultant of the year" for his international breakthrough with this concept.

Read more about Bjørn [here](#).



¹ Where members combine different individual cultures in order to create a new, shared one together. (More in: *Transformative Dialogue for Third Culture Building*, 2011, Kazuma Matoba.)