

# International Team Development Encouraging Dialogue to Enable Integration

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Large organisations in today's world, both in the profit and non-profit sectors need to and often want to work across borders. These borders may be national borders, they may also be ethnic, regional, religious, organisational, functional borders. Working across borders not only involves coming to terms with cultural differences (a passive perspective), it really means learning to understand the drivers that other organisations and individuals have.

Concretely: due to an organisational initiative, an individual needs to work together with other colleagues from abroad (a "foreign" organisation or a "foreign" culture). Of course everybody knows what this entails.....do they? Of course everybody is clear what their individual needs are.....are they? Of course, everybody is clear what the organisation's needs are.....are they? Which organisation? Of course everybody is clear what is / is not possible.....are they? And the questions continue ad infinitum.

This workshop is about integration. It will demonstrate a number of simple tools and methods, successfully used throughout Europe, North America and Asia, which can be used to support teams in their process of developing from a group of individuals towards a functioning team.

Integration is a pre-requisite for successful teams. All successful teams require a framework in which the team members are able to function. People are only able to really function when they can "be". The sometimes wildly diverse needs and expectations of the team members make international teams far more complex than national teams. This diversity of needs results in and stems from a range of mindsets, thought patterns, value systems, histories, environments, individual experiences,.....

An essential task of any project leader (sometimes with the support of a process facilitator) is to establish a project structure within which all members can be themselves – in today's fast moving world a particular challenge because time seems to have taken on a new meaning for many organisation decision makers. Integration can only take place when the team members "buy-in" to the process and this they will only do if and when they as individuals feel accepted. They will normally have been selected for their roles due to their skills. They should be given the opportunity to display these skills to the full.

Integration does not mean that all team members act in the same way.

Integration means that all team members are able to be, to function within a structure encompassing acceptance of the existing diversity. The benefits of this diversity will then be able to evolve for the benefit of the project. In brief: acceptance of difference with the focus on one common purpose.

This paper contains a summary of a number of activities designed to help establish an integration structure. It is not comprehensive and focuses on the *initial stages* of supporting the development of an international team.

## Message

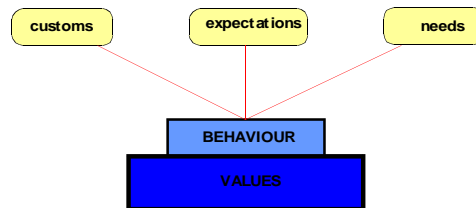
- **Manage the integration of the people**
- **The people will manage the integration of the tasks**

## How?

**Let them talk !**

## Background

The following diagram displays significant factors affecting our behaviour.



### Values as the foundation of behaviour

The complexity and influence of culture in all its dimensions can be seen here:

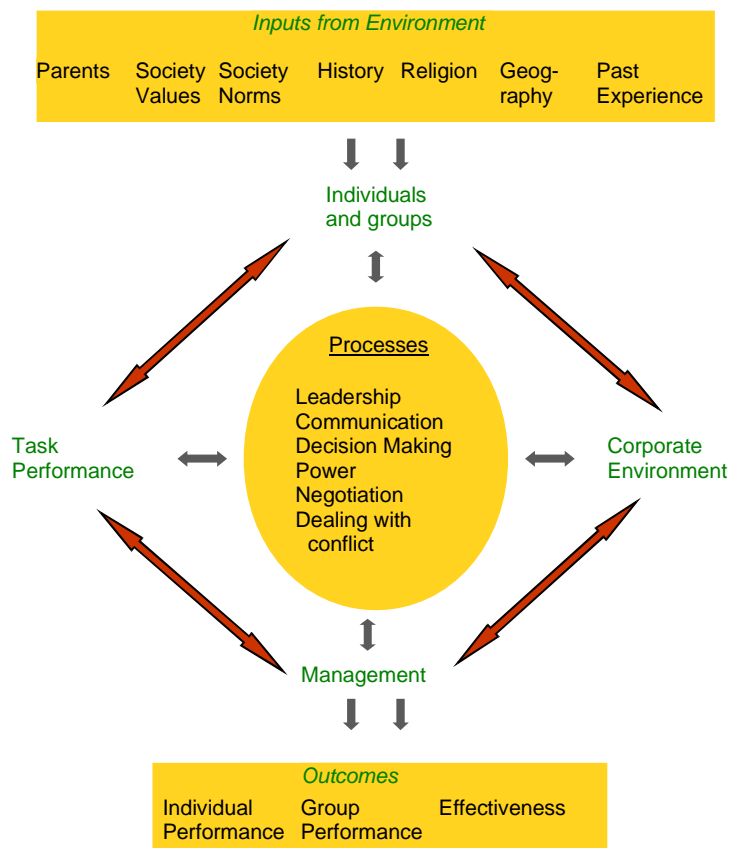


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In any team development situation, it is the individuals in a team that we are dealing with. The individuals are real, living. Cultures are real and living, but for the individual in any given situation, only a concept.

The model indicates some of the questions team members can ask of each other to establish their and others drivers. The facilitator briefs and debriefs.

### **A Model of Cultural Influences on Behaviour in Business**



## The Challenges

Issues for Team Development		Additional Challenges for International Teams
What do we want/need to do together?	→	Establishing a process acceptable to all, taking into account, accepting and respecting the different needs of all members.
What do we want/need to achieve together?		
How are we going to achieve it, together?		
A balance of roles in the team		
Selection of appropriate team members for specific roles and tasks	→	Who selects? Which criteria? NATURAL personal cultural bias of selector(s)?
Integrating different working styles of team members	→	Greater variety of ideas about the "right"/"best" way to work
Benefiting from the diversity in the team	→	Acceptance of difference as a resource and therefore a strength
Establishing common working principles	→	Common understanding of these principles
Developing commitment	→	Differing understandings and foundations for "commitment"
Establishing responsibilities	→	Differing understandings and foundations for "responsibility"
Developing trust	→	Differing foundations for "trust"
Communication culture	→	Differences in what is considered acceptable / unacceptable in interpersonal communication
Team leadership	→	Different expectations of leader from team members Different expectations of teams members from leader
Creating processes	→	Different ideas on appropriate processes
Action planning	→	Different ideas on appropriate action planning. (Who? How? What? When?)

## Selected Approaches (for the initial stages of International Team Development Processes)

Additional Challenges for International Teams		Possible Activities and Approaches
Establishing a process acceptable to all, taking into account, accepting and respecting the different needs of all members.	→	<p>"The Stereotype Gallery"</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>"Of course I know what a TEAM is, do you?"</li> <li>What do you understand by "Respect"?</li> </ul>
Who selects team members? Which criteria? NATURAL personal cultural bias of selector(s)?	→	Awareness of traps for selectors (often team leaders). Self-awareness ("Who am I?", "What are my values based on?" "What makes me the way I am and act the way I do?" (see model of cultural influences on behaviour in business)
Working Styles: Greater variety of ideas about the "right"/"best" way to work	→	"right"/"best" are culturally dependent concepts. "Six key aspects of international business contact" is the kind of activity that helps to establish this.
Diversity: acceptance of difference as a resource and therefore a strength	→	Problem solving activity with observers "Decisions, decisions"
Common understanding of team working principles	→	"Six key aspects of international business contact"
Differing understandings and foundations for "commitment"	→	"Six key aspects of international business contact"
Differing understandings and foundations for "responsibility"	→	"Six key aspects of international business contact"
Differing foundations for "trust"	→	"Six key aspects of international business contact"
Team Communication Culture: Differences in what is considered acceptable / unacceptable in interpersonal communication	→	"Who am I? Who are you?" What do you understand by "Respect"?
Team Leadership Different expectations of leader from team members Different expectations of teams members from leader	→	Leaders workshop: "Describe how you as leader see your relationship to employees /team members." Facilitator visualises. Group picks up. "What I expect of my boss" = "what my employees expect of me!" / "What I expect of my employees."
Different ideas on appropriate processes	→	Problem solving activity with observers
Different ideas on appropriate action planning (Who? How? What? When?)	→	If the team has at least started work together on the significant interpersonal processes, this should no longer be a problem.

These activities are published in Global Competence 50 Training Activities for Succeeding in International Business, available for order (please contact us).