Diversity Icebreaker®

CASE STUDY (1)	INTEGRATION AND BUSINESS PROCESSES CLARIFICATION – RESEARCH-ORIENTED PHARMACEUTICAL COMPANY.
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Areas:	communication training, team work, diversity management

Brief

I approached Bjørn Z. Ekelund from Human Factors AS, Norway, and asked if he could contribute with the Diversity Icebreaker session in the first part of the two-day training session for twenty-four members of a research-oriented pharmaceutical company based in Denmark.

The organization has experienced a dynamic growth and almost doubled its staff size in the last year, i.e. half of the employees were recruited relatively recent. At the same time, the members of the organization have never had a collective meeting, during which they could get to know each other and clarify their shared understanding of the firm's modus operandi. The group was culturally mixed with most of them Danish and with 90% of the employees having long, academic careers.

Action

Given the outlined challenges and opportunities the firm was facing, two general objectives of the training session were formulated over a teleconference with the firm's management team:

a) get acquainted with each other and establish a safe psychological climate facilitating further work, and:

b) clarify a shared understanding of the company's key business processes, i.e. define roles, functions, actions and criteria.

Day 1.

In order to provide the group with a warm-up before they would engage into more demanding discussions about the key business processes, as well as to build a platform for further work, a classical Diversity Icebreaker session was conducted, which elicited humour and relaxed the atmosphere facilitating further interactions. It also was an opportunity to get to know each other for those participants who had not met before.

After that, the consultant led a follow up to the session, which involved:

- an interactive discussion of the learning points from the session, which established a shared understanding of the cognitive diversity reflected in the Red, Blue and Green categories;
- a discussion on how to work together in small teams in order to be efficient and innovative (with the use of the Team Pyramid model described in the Personal Workbook)
- a short lecture about Dialogue: Using the "Mapping-Bridging-Integrating" model;
- interviews in triads of different colours concerning differences and similarities in perception of values important for successful work;

- presentation of the individual Diversity Icebreaker results and discussion of their implications for the group
- sharing of experience from cross-cultural and cross-professional work in mono-coloured groups (one-colour groups configuration was intended to create a positive climate that would continue to the next day, when the participants would again work with people of the same colour).

The last activity that day involved sharing ideas and images non-verbally between different departments and was meant as a starting point for open communication of different qualities and contrasting the groups self-presentation and the others' external perceptions of them.

Day 2.

In Phase 1 of the second day, the participants worked in base groups, which were pre-set by the managing director to assure the best competence configuration in regard to each of the key areas. Each of the groups then worked for about one hour on one of the four business processes indicated as the most important for the company and their task was to describe as precise as possible its development.
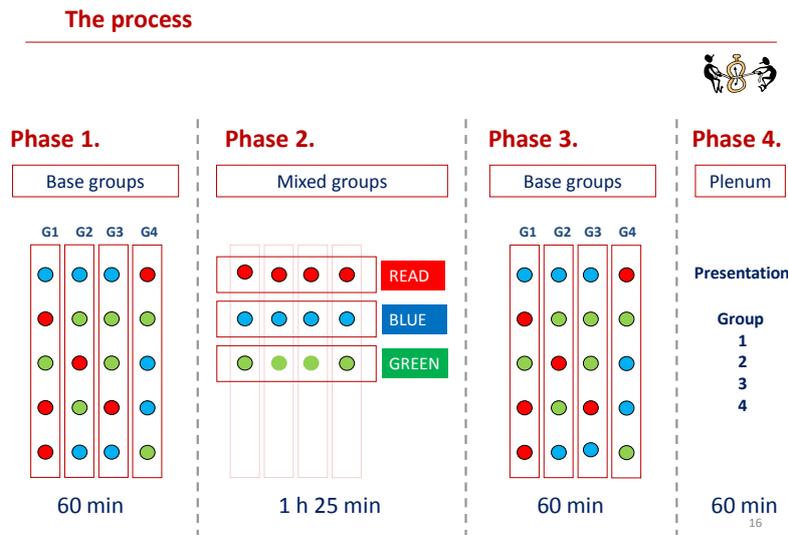
In Phase 2 of this exercise the participants left their base groups and formed one colour groups to discuss the results of their work among people with a similar cognitive perspective. This was done to intensify the qualities of each colour in the formulated feedback and further polarize distinctive type of critical thinking, as well as to create a facilitating, safe psychological climate, easily attainable among people of the same colour.

In Phase 3 the participants returned to their base groups and presented the comments about the initial ideas they had formulated in the one-colour groups, in Phase 2. The participants with the dominant Green colour were asked to present first, Blue and then Red followed. This is sequence was in line with the traditional use of the qualities represented by colours in creative problem solving processes.

In Phase 4, all the groups shared their results in plenum on in "The Gallery" presentation form where their ideas were displayed on flipcharts and people walked about and were reading them. An oral presentation and discussion facilitated by the consultant followed.

At the end of the day, the managing manager summarized the end status of the seminar and gave an overview of how the processes the group had gone through should be continue in order to formulate goals, roles and deliverables clearly ("who will do what, when, how and to what purpose?").

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Makes people reflect, ask, listen and talk

The figure below illustrates the activities of Day 2:

The process

Phase 1.	Phase 2.	Phase 3.	Phase 4.
Base groups	Mixed groups	Base groups	Plenum

Phase 2 groups: READ, BLUE, GREEN

Phase 4: Presentation Group 1 2 3 4

Phase 1: 60 min — Phase 2: 1 h 25 min — Phase 3: 60 min — Phase 4: 60 min

Results

Thanks to the atmosphere generated in the Diversity Icebreaker, with laughter and positive emotions, the participants got to know each other, created expectancy for trustful behaviour in the future and formulated a shared acceptance of the differences among them. Furthermore, using the Red, Blue and Green cognitive diversity model, they have created a shared language to communicate and discuss these differences.

Along with the safe psychological climate, this shared language enabled them to start defining the four key business processes with consideration of the multiple perspectives present in the organization. This has assured a common understanding of concepts in regard to the core elements of the company's business processes. The ideas on how to use Red, Blue and Green in teams and in creative problem solving were shared with the customer as part of the follow up.

About the author:

Jacob S. Christensen is a business consultant with over 36 years of professional experience. He is a licensed psychologist with a MA in Organizational psychology, and is a specialist and supervisor in I/O psychology; owner of the SANDCHRISTENSEN Consulting Company since 1997.

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