

CASE STUDY (6)

KICK-OFF OF A 2 DAYS INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF INTERCULTURAL COLLABORATION

Consultant/case author:

Bjørn Z. Ekelund

Areas:

kick-off, cross-cultural training

Brief

The international conference that attracted around 100 participants from 27 countries all over the world had been set up in order to bring together three different types of professionals and academics that normally did not interact due to their different disciplinary oriented backgrounds. One group was recruited from the fields of virtual technology development and computer-supported cooperative work, another group shared an interest in digital language identification and translation – and the third group of scholars and consultants could be named the interculturalists. A foresight idea had triggered the idea of bringing these people and disciplines together, an idea of future global collaboration where virtual communication did not only use English as common second language platform for communication, but where the cultural diversity in workgroups was also viewed as a resource.

Action

Objectives

The objectives of the Diversity Icebreaker session were to:

- 1) Start the conference by an exercise that made people interested to initiate dialogues where understanding and learning from the other was a central component.
- 2) Create a positive experience, with humour and laughter as a positive reinforcement for openness and dialogue
- 3) Create a language that could make it easier for participants to communicate and work together during the conference.
- 4) Create a feeling of cohesion / unification - make people feel that they belonged to a larger community.

Form

The one hour session was presented as the opening key note speech. It underlined this activity as important more than an “icebreaker” announcement would have done. In the introduction I highlighted the need of having good dialogues among people from different disciplines as a necessity for innovation and joined knowledge creation. The format was then a true replication of the classical Diversity Icebreaker seminar format with filling in the questionnaire, going into even numbered groups, sharing results between the groups and then, at the end, an open question of “What could we learn from this exercise?”

Results:

A testimonial from one of the ICIC 2010 conference hosts:

"Lots of humor came out of the groups when they shared results. This untraditional keynote speech functioned as an icebreaker, and the categories of Red, Blue and Green became a tribe language that people referred to during the conference."

Anne-Marie Søderberg, Professor of Cross-Cultural Communication and Management, Copenhagen Business School, co-chair of the ICIC 2010 conference

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](#).

