

## The Diversity Icebreaker for third culture-building: a social constructionist approach for managing diversity.

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### Introduction

The basic concept of “third culture building” approach came from the social constructionist view of the creative relationship between diversity and unity. According to this view, diversity and unity are expressed in communication and this communication, in turn, constructs or reconstructs diversity and unity as social reality. In such a construction process individuals from different cultures are integrated in a new hybrid culture which each of them can accept as a new part of her/his cultural identity (Matoba, 2011). In the process of “third culture building” to construct unified diversity, it is our recommendation that the focus should be put not so much on the social identity diversity (gender, age, ethnicity, nationality, physical conditions, sexual orientation etc.) but rather on the cognitive diversity (how we see, predict, analyse, interpret information) which is less likely to lead to prejudice and the negative potential of conflict (Matoba, 2011, Ekelund & Maznevski, 2008). We have seen this cognitive diversity perspective being developed in the classic Diversity Icebreaker seminar (Ekelund & Langvik, 2008) at group level where the social construction of cognitive diversity becomes a part of the common ground for trustful interaction. In the classic seminar the participants creates an inside-outside / actor-observer perspective on three different cognitive styles called Red (social, emotional), Blue (sequential, detail) and Green (holistic, conceptual). There are different elements in the classic seminar that create a unique common ground for transformative dialogue which is a central part of “third culture building” (Matoba, 2011). Based upon our theoretical understanding and practice of applying the Diversi-

ty Icebreaker we will present 7 areas of the Diversity Icebreaker seminar that resonate with the ideas of “third culture”. In such way, this chapter will present for the first time the theoretical links between the classic Diversity Icebreaker seminar and the establishing of a new “third culture”. In this presentation we will also highlight in which directions it is possible to move in order to suggest hypotheses that can be empirically tested.

Then, at the end, there will be a presentation of a student’s experiences in using the Diversity Icebreaker in “third culture building.” This case illustrates the processes seen through the eyes of a participant.

## **Part 1: The concept of “third culture building”**

### ***Social construction of diversity and unity***

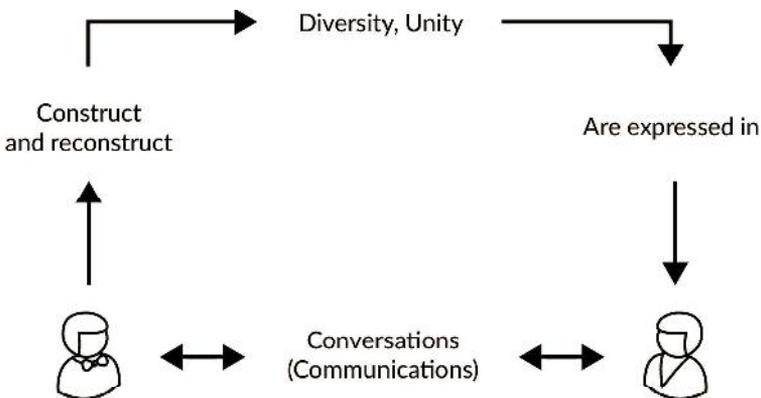
The social constructionist position is that communication is much more than transmission; it is also the process through which humans (re)construct their social worlds. It assumes that what people do together through social interaction will shape what it is they produce together. In this light, communication is a process of making and doing. Our social worlds are expressed in conversations and these conversations, in turn, construct or re-construct our social worlds. One significant aspect of social constructionism is that its emphasis is on what people say and what people do while engaged in interaction. Each individual action and utterance is both a response to the acts that preceded it and a condition for the acts that will follow it. In a string of multiple actions made by people engaged in conversation, a pattern of interaction emerges. With practice and repetition a kind of logic or grammar can follow that guides the communicators in determining what to do and how to act. Spano (2001:46) explains that “people act into patterns of interaction that have been created for them, and sometimes by them, and yet they can also change the pattern of communication depending on the specific actions they take together”. Through a social constructionist orientation we can see how our social worlds are ever-changing and always

open to negotiation and change. In this fluid process of construction and reconstruction, changes in any of these worlds will lead to different responses which in turn will shape the formation of different outcomes. There seems to be an element of unpredictability, but “people can act on the knowledge that what they do in communication will inevitably affect the process in some way, shape, or form” (ibid. p 47).

Figure 1 presents a circle of unity and diversity as an application of a social constructionist model for the integrated constructionist approach for managing diversity. Diversity and unity in social reality are constructed and coordinated by our communication. Through communication, the diversity actively coordinates unity in its own interests and it is passively coordinated by unity, and vice versa unity actively coordinates diversity in its own interests and it is passively coordinated by diversity. Within such coordination between diversity and unity “we humans become recognizable to ourselves and to others and recognize ourselves, other people, and things as meaningful in distinctive ways” (Lankshear, 1997: xiv). Diversity and unity as constructions are expressed in our communication and if their tension can be held in creative suspension, they can be very meaningful.

**Figure 1**

*Social Constructionist Model for Diversity and Unity*



### ***Third culture building***

Social constructionist approach of managing diversity can be defined as the view that diversity should be reconstructed through communication so that unity can be constructed through communication. This view can be found in the “third culture building model” which assumes that participants in the process of intercultural communication should and can develop a “third culture” by mutually negotiating their cultural differences. Chen and Starosta (1998:134) describe this process in terms of a negotiation process which involves the mutual effort to adapt to the values of one another and to reconfigure their cultural identity. This model seems to be adequately suited to the explanation and understanding of the dynamic nature of managing diversity processes.

According to the constructionist view, individuals are socialized toward not only accepting the dominant views of reality given to them by their cultures (i.e. knowledge), but also toward understanding how the world should be enacted (i.e. with judgements and values). Knowledge and values can always be constructed in different ways because they are cultural constructions. Evanoff (1999:126) states that “individuals are capable of engaging in critical reflection on how the world is to be understood and acted in; and to thus transform existing social understandings and relationships”. Social constructionists see individuals as being able to step outside of their own culture and change the cultural norms and laws which govern their societies, although culture itself is a social construct which constrains human freedom. Society, consisting of members with this competence, can be changed and transformed into a new culture, a “third culture”. Useem (1971:14) defines the term “third culture” as “cultural patterns inherited and created, learned and shared by the members of two or more different societies who are personally involved in relating their society, or segments thereof ‘to each other’”. Casimir (1999:112) stresses the importance of the meaning of dialogue for “third culture building”.

The “third culture building” model assumes that participants in the process of intercultural communication should and can

develop a “third culture” by mutually negotiating their cultural differences. In this process all participants are expected to bring their own schemata to any given communication process. And it can be equally expected that transformation or change [of culture] can be and is brought about by dialogue to organize and reorganize chaotic environments.

Evanoff (2000:128) points out that “the outcome of the dialogue process should, ideally, not be a mere compromise in which either or both of the sides is obliged to give up values deemed important to them, but rather an ‘integrative agreement’ which combines positive aspects of each of the respective cultural traditions in a new conceptual framework”. A “third culture”, therefore, “would represent an expression of mutuality which can be understood, supported and defended by all who shared in its development” (Casmir, 1997:109). A “third culture” is the construction of a mutually interactive environment which is beneficial to all those who have a part in developing it. This process of construction is a communication-centred, long-term building process and has four phases: contact, need, interaction and interdependence.

The “third culture building” approach of diversity management argues that if diversity and unity are indeed a matter of social construction, then there is no reason why principles and norms for diversity and unity cannot be constructed across cultures as much as they are within cultures. Cross-cultural encounters create a new context for dialogue in which socially constructed diversity can be suspended and reconstructed coupled with a new construction toward unity.

Starting with Casmir’s (1997:103) three assumptions below, which are needed for “third culture building”, the author has added three more which he has derived from the above discussions. All six can be applied to diversity management in that:

1. "Culture [is] a dynamic, changing human creation".
2. "The involvement of human beings [is necessary] in a cultural change process, from the bottom up".
3. "Culture [is] the result of communication interactions within a collection of numerous sub-cultures, which produce "third cultures" as organic entities".
4. An individual is more diverse as a whole than she/he is culturally diverse alone.
5. The concepts of unity and diversity are not mutually exclusive. They are integrated in a suspended tension. There is no unity without diversity; there is no diversity without unity.
6. A "third culture" is a new constructed unity and can be built by reconstructing diversity.

### ***Cognitive diversity***

Organizations with diverse workforces can be divided theoretically into two diverse groups: one group identified with a particular diversity category and another group without it; e.g. female and not female, European and not European, old employee and young employee, etc. Diversity management focuses on a few diversity categories but not all. If cross-cultural diversity management is introduced to and implemented in German organizations with culturally diverse workforces in order to promote and empower ethnic minority groups such as Turks, Croatians, and Russians, the majority group may feel that they are not treated fairly. Also, the minority groups may feel uncomfortable because they may not want to be treated as members of a minority group. It is possible that the cleft between the minority and majority groups grow wider and deeper and tensions could escalate into serious conflicts within the minority group as well. It seems that focusing of certain types of diversity in diversity management can generate emotional conflict (cf. Pelled, Eisenhardt & Xin, 1999).

McGrath, Berdahl & Arrow (1995) propose a categorization of diversity with five clusters:

1. demographic characteristics such as age, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, physical status, religion and education;
2. task-related knowledge, skills and capacities;
3. values, views and attitudes;
4. personality, cognitive and attitudinal styles;
5. status in the organization such as one's hierarchical position, professional domain, depart-mental affiliation and seniority.

In recent years more attention has been given to the functional dimension of diversity which has typically been discussed in the research fields called knowledge management and mental models (Kilduff, Angelmar & Mehra, 2000; Mohammed & Dumville, 2001; Tegarden, Tegarden & Sheetz, 2003; Cummings, 2004; Sauer, Felsing, Franke & Rüttinger, 2006; Page, 2007).

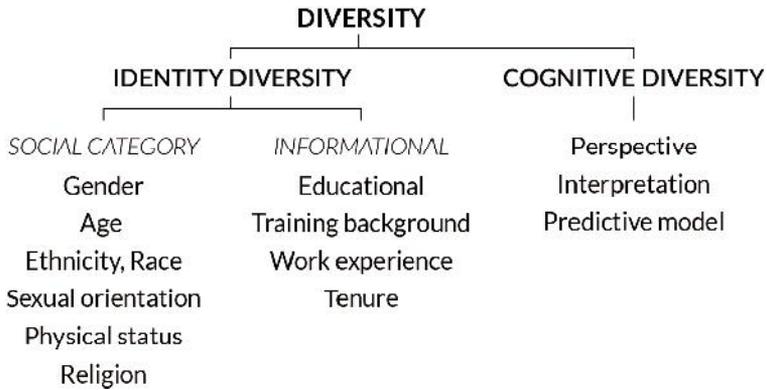
The negative effect of accentuating representative diversity may be due to the fact that this kind of diversity can lead to interpersonal conflict in workgroups. There may be a mismatch between the representational categories of identities and the self-perception of these identities. This hypothetical connection between such an accentuation and conflict is empirically supported by Jehn, Northcraft & Neale (1999). In taking into consideration this discussion about the negative aspect of representative diversity, two categories of diversity are distinguished by Page (2007:11): identity diversity and cognitive diversity. Identity diversity leads to dichotomous attributions which are constructed in the society. One has a tendency to prefer one of two opposite attributions like black or white for race. This preference is constructed individually through her/his socialization process and collectively through political and historical communication processes.

Those who are cognitively not able to free themselves from bipolar preferences constructed individually or socially habitually think in terms of stereotypes. Stereotypes create problems. Because they are “predictive models about people, and not about physical phenomena [and] they influence behaviour and can become self-reinforcing” (Page, 2007:365). Stereotypes also “restrict people’s ability to contribute by restricting how they think” (ibid. p 366), suggesting that we should be careful or even reluctant to think of diversity in terms of identity diversity as it can easily lead to stereotyping and unnecessary conflicts. Thomas & Ely (1996) emphasize that “diversity should be understood as the varied perspectives and approaches to work, which members of different identity groups bring.”

Page (2007:7) focuses more on the cognitive diversity or “cognitive differences” which, in contrast to the identity diversity, foster innovation and do not create conflict. For Miller (1990) “cognitive diversity refers to variation in beliefs concerning cause-effect relationships and variation in preferences concerning various goals for the organization”. Sauer, Felsing, Franke & Rüttinger (2006:935) define cognitive diversity as internal team differences in “underlying and task-related attributes, such as abilities, knowledge, expertise and problem-solving strategies”. One remarkable advantage of the cognitive diversity, according to Page, is that it is clearly distinguished from the identity diversity. He calls the identity diversity a “preference diversity”, because people can have a preference or a choice to construct their own identities.

**Figure 2**

*Identity and Cognitive Diversity*



According to Page (2007:7), cognitive diversity consists of four formal frameworks:

- “Diverse perspectives: ways of representing situations and problems;
- Diverse interpretations: ways of categorizing or partitioning perspectives;
- Diverse heuristics: ways of generating solutions to problems;
- Diverse predictive models: ways of inferring cause and effect.”

The first formal framework of diverse perspectives relates to how people perceive situations and problems differently. Page (2007:31) defines perspective as “a map from reality to an internal language such that each distinct object, situation, problem, or event gets mapped to a unique word.”

The second formal framework, the diverse interpretation, “can be thought of as structured categorizations” (Page, 2007:76). Page maintains that one categorizes reality and “creates or exploits

an underlying structure by ignoring some dimensions of a perspective ('projection interpretation'), or by creating "categories of similar objects, situations, problems, or events that are not simply projections of attributes ('clumping interpretation')" (ibid. p 81). On an airport, for example, passengers are categorized into first class, business class or economy class passengers at airline counter and later categorized into alien or non-alien at passport check gate. Passengers, being human, have many personal dimensions with many categories, but just a few dimensions are created by ignoring all other dimensions. These interpretations categorize passengers differently depending on purpose. The diverse interpretations lead us to draw different inferences, which "affect how we predict outcomes and infer causality..." (ibid. p 89).

The third framework, the diverse heuristics, consists of rules which can be "applied for an existing solution represented in a perspective that generates a new solution or a new set of possible solutions" (Page, 2007:55). If perspectives involve maps of situations and problems, heuristics are the rules or tools which lead to solutions. Without a diversity of heuristics, it is not possible to expect to solve difficult problems effectively. If two people use different heuristics, they are likely to "find different solutions of unequal value" (ibid. p 71). These heuristics are acquired and developed by practice and experience (including experiential training) which are filtered by identity.

The fourth formal framework, the diverse predictive models, involves "an interpretation together with a prediction for each set or category created by the interpretation" (ibid. p 92). While a predictive model tells us what we think will happen such as "the train seems to be delayed", a heuristics tells us what to do like "we must go by bus." Page summarizes the relationship between perspectives, interpretations and predictive models:

If we want to predict something, we have to have some way of representing those entities whose out-comes we are predicting. Perspectives would give us a full and complete representation, but in most cases people don't use perspectives. We use interpretations – categorizations – based on perspectives. Given these

interpretations, we then make predictions based on our experiences or on a theory. We call these predictions, together with the interpretations, a predictive model.

Page (2007:101)

Attributes of the social category diversity such as ethnicity, gender and age, etc. shape our experience and limit our choices and opportunities e.g. in education or for being promoted to higher levels in an organization. Social category diversity influences informational diversity. Together as combined attributes they lead to identity diversity. They also lead to different experiences the management of which is then related to cognitive diversity. Page (2007:14) argues that “cognitive diversity increases innovation. Preference diversity leads to squabbles“. It would mean for identity diverse groups that they will perform better than homogeneous groups if (a) the identity diversity translates into cognitive diversity relevant for specific tasks, (b) the identity diversity does not translate into fundamental preference diversity and (c) their members get along with each another. Identity diversity should produce benefits only when it correlates with or leads to cognitive diversity. Page adds, moreover, that this advantage of identity diverse group can be seen “only for problem solving and for prediction, not for the more routine tasks” (ibid. p 325).

Behind these hypotheses two important questions have been discussed in terms of cognitive diversity. The first question concerns the relationship between identity and cognitive diversity. A linkage between the two is assumed to exist by most researchers (e.g. Smith et al., 1994; Wiersema & Bantel, 1992), but some evidence found e.g. by Glick et al. (1993) suggests that such linkage may not exist. A business simulation research by Kilduff, Angelmar & Mehra (2000) does not confirm the hypothesis that the higher the identity diversity of the top management team the higher the cognitive diversity exhibited in the team's decision-making process. This research shows that members of high-performing teams tended to preserve multiple interpretations early in the team's life cycle but they moved toward greater clarity and convergence near the end of its life cycle. This study suggests that three types of identity diversity (nationality, age

and function) cannot predict cognitive diversity: *specialization, power, ambiguity, decision difficulty, decision pressure* and *effectiveness*. These six types of cognitive diversity are more likely to be associated with an institutional context.

1. Specialization: Before team members can function as an organization (institutionalized), perception of role specialization in the team is necessary, which Berger & Luckmann (1967:74) call “construction of role typologies”.
2. Power: In an institutionalization process the distribution of power in the organization is important to know for decision-making.
3. Ambiguity: The greater the diversity among team members the more interpretative ambiguity may be exhibited in terms of searching for agreement about what should lead to good or bad performance.
4. Decision difficulty is assessed as “the degree to which each participant perceives team decision making to be a habitual, routine, taken-for-granted activity”. Berger & Luckmann (1967:54) point out that “habitualization makes it unnecessary for each situation to be defined anew, step by step”.
5. Decision pressure may be felt by each individual more or less as s/he converges onto agreement with the team decision.
6. Effectiveness: In a habitualization process in which increasing consensus easily leads to complacency, e.g. in people’s attitudes toward procedures, improving effectiveness becomes more difficult.

All these types of cognitive diversity can be understood as kinds of static awareness of how each individual perceives her/his group in a process of institutionalization.

These varieties of research conclusions regarding the correlation between cognitive diversity and organizational performance

derive from different definitions of cognitive diversity which presupposes a distinction between static and dynamic cognitive diversity. After his review of much of the recent research on the correlation between identity diversity, cognitive diversity and performance, Page (2007:306-307) assumes that identity diversity plays a major role when we construct cognitive diversity.

Attributes such as race shape our experiences limit, steer, and even guide our choices. Thus, identity attributes cause us to construct different sets of cognitive tools. Sometimes these are not chosen so much as forced on us. So to think that people possess the traits that they do because they are somehow essential, somehow determined by their identities, is to commit what psychologists call a fundamental attribution error. Just because someone slips and falls does not mean that he or she is clumsy. It could mean that his or her front porch is icy. Similarly, just because someone thinks in a certain way does not imply a genetic link. His way of thought could have been influenced more by his or her environment than by his genes. Thus, we cannot attribute differences to essential differences unless environments are the same.

Though identity matters, we cannot equate individual tools or collections of tools with specific identities. We can expect, however, that identity differences lead to experiential differences that in turn create tool differences.

On the basis of the assumption that there is a connection between identity diversity and cognitive diversity (albeit bridged by diverse experience), Page (2007) reaches three theoretical conclusions:

1. The more identity diversity an organization has, the more cognitive diversity it can develop and leverage. (363)
2. Identity diversity can create stereotypes which “influence behaviour and can become self-reinforcing” (365). Stereotypes “restrict people’s ability to contribute by restricting how they think” (366).

3. “For identity diversity to be beneficial it must be linked with cognitive diversity. And the extent to which identity diversity translates into cognitive diversity depends on the context” (324)

Identity diversity should produce benefits only when it somehow correlates with or leads to cognitive diversity. An important remaining question is: How does identity diversity translate into cognitive diversity? This question can be answered by finding the link between identity diversity and cognitive diversity. The author maintains at least part of the link is to be found in the diversity of communication styles and language use.

## **Part 2: The Diversity Icebreaker**

### ***Short history of the Diversity Icebreaker***

The Diversity Icebreaker (DI) builds on a model of categorising persons with a questionnaire in three different preferences for communication and interaction, a cognitive diversity model (Ekelund, 2012). The concept of these three categories was first developed by Ekelund (1997) primarily for market communication and effective communication strategies in consultation for reducing energy consumption at households. The three core types are labelled by assumingly neutral colours – Red, Blue and Green. The Red role preference is characterized by a relational focus, personal involvement and a social perspective; the Blue role is identified by a focus on structure and task, with a logical perspective; while the Green role is recognized by a focus on change, vision and ideas.

In 1998 the first questionnaire identifying individual propensity to either role was made. It has been revised two times and today the questionnaire has 42 statements that are rated in an ipsative form. The Red, Blue and Green dimensions have demonstrated good internal reliability, with Cronbach’s alpha levels of .75 and higher (Langvik, 2006; Ekelund & Pluta, 2013). Validation of the questionnaire has been done in relation to different

psychological concepts reported in an edited book by Ekelund & Langvik (2008) and its quality as a concept for individual development in seminars confirmed by DNV GL in 2013 (Ekelund & Pluta, 2013). The concept has been translated into 19 different languages, used worldwide and with more than 120 000 users in 2014 ([www.diversityicebreaker.com](http://www.diversityicebreaker.com)). The questionnaire is used in combination with a seminar focusing on the social construction of the meaning of Red, Blue and Green – and it is this combination of the psychological questionnaire with a seminar that has made it into a multi paradigmatic concept shifting disciplinary perspectives between psychology, sociology, political theory and linguistics (Ekelund, Davcheva & Iversen, 2009). It has been used in cross-cultural training and development since 2003 and the first presentation of the concept used in this context took place in 2008 (Ekelund & Maznevski, 2008, Ekelund, Shneor & Gehrke, 2008). The use of the concept in cross-cultural conflict situations have been theoretically founded in 2010 (Ekelund, 2010a) and systematic testing of the model in this context has been and is being done in the Middle East (Sagiv et al, 2012; Ekelund, 2013).

We will now present the use of the questionnaire in the seminar using the 5 stages model developed in 2009 presented by Ekelund, Davcheva and Iversen (2009). This is done in order to have reference points for linking the seven elements, from the first part of this chapter on the “third culture building”, to the use of the Diversity Icebreaker.

### ***A description of the seminar in 5 stages***

**The first stage** of the seminar is about setting the scene. Often this is done by the trainers saying,

We are gathered here to promote a better cooperation between the participants. A basic premise for good communication is that we need to understand ourselves, the other, and how the other perceives us. Then we can choose words and statements that will function well in the communication. In order to help in this self- and other- understanding psychologists have developed

a questionnaire measuring different preferences for communication. We would like you to fill this out.

Then the candidates fill in the Diversity Icebreaker questionnaire. The participants self-administer the scoring immediately and figure out what their score is in each preference, labelled as: Red, Blue and Green. Since the preferences and colours have not been explained or defined, the results are meaningless at that point. And the participants ask questions like “What do the results like 38 Blue, 20 Red and 36 Green really mean?” The quest and motivation for self-understanding is driving the curiosity of the participants.

The second stage starts with splitting the participants in three evenly numbered groups, based upon their most dominant colour, relative to the general characteristics of the group, as they arise from the results. When the groups are set, participants are given two questions to answer, “What are the good qualities of your own colour in interaction with others?” and “What are the qualities of the two other colour groups in interactions they have with each of the other groups?” Each group lists characteristics on flip-charts, and when the positive sides of their own colour are presented, some of the participants raise the issue of including negative sides, too. This sometimes leads to a discussion of what are the good and the bad ways of representing oneself to the other. This continues as they write down the qualities of the other colour groups. Participants often feel amused and slightly embarrassed when they suggest negative characteristics for the others. The forming of a distinct in-group and out-group feeling is very typical.

When groups have finished their tasks, we move on to **the third stage** when the trainer asks each group to present its characteristics to all the other groups. The trainer also explains that this is an important part of learning about ‘the other’ as well as about seeing the difference between personal identity versus social identity. Participants become aware of how the concepts of Red, Blue and Green are perceived both from an insider and an outsider perspective. They experience a feeling of cohesion

within the in-group, and how easy and fun it is to be together with people who are similar. This is contrasted to the ideas they have developed of the others and their fantasies of how difficult interacting with them could be.

**The fourth stage** is a learning process which we initiate by asking the participants to take a look from the outside. The question which triggers it is: “What has been going on and what have you learned from the time when you started filling out the questionnaire until what you have now said and heard?” The answers to this question are, for example, “It is nice to be working among equals,” “There are some significant consequences of labelling each other,” “Isn’t it strange that it is so easy for me to act and identify myself with Blue, even though I am predominately Red really?,” “We need all colours when we work together”, “It is OK to be Red if the others acknowledge this as a positive quality in our interaction”, etc. All these comments are then acknowledged by the trainer and discussed with regard to the goals and objectives of the training session. Among the significant outcomes of this stage is a realisation that differences, surfacing through interaction with others, create an in-group vs. out-group dynamic, growth of prejudices and stereotyping, polarisation, and identity challenges. On the positive side, a shared understanding emerges that we can all benefit from each other as long as individual qualities are positively acknowledged and utilised in the interaction.

**The fifth stage** is focused on developing ideas about what to do tomorrow. This is a salient follow-up of the understanding of the social construction of the categories. It can be applied if a trainer has a group and a consultation task of developing a collective group into a self-managed group. For example, in a reconciliation process between two conflicting parties a fifth stage like this can be nurtured by questions like, “What social constructs have in a dysfunctional way influenced our interaction?”, “How can we build a shared platform for understanding and new social constructs that works better, brings more beauty and contributes to a better understanding of our world?”, “What are the more functional ways of interacting?”, “What are the plans for tomorrow?”. Thus the participants are more likely to take control

of how to define the world, what language to use, and how to act in the days to come.

### ***The third culture seen through eyes of the Diversity Icebreaker seminar and categories***

Now we have presented the 5 stages of the seminar and we will continue by presenting 7 different elements in the first part of this chapter that are directly relevant for the Diversity Icebreaker seminars. The 7 elements are:

1. Introducing DI as a cognitive diversity model is recommended before entering into informational and identity diversity issues.
2. Reality is constructed through communication.
3. Social constructionism emphasises words and acts in interaction.
4. Unifying and diversifying are two interdependent processes.
5. “Third culture building” implies that individuals bring their own schemata of cultural values and negotiate these cultural differences in relation to a joint chaotic environment.
6. Cognitive diversity models and the link between internal and external language.
7. Cognitive diversity in management teams.

In relation to each of the 7 points we will when possible discuss questions revolving around:

- What are the similarities and differences on theoretical perspectives between these elements?

- What practical implications do we see for building a “third culture” using the Diversity Icebreaker?
  - What research questions emerge from what has been said so far?
1. *Introducing DI as a cognitive diversity model is recommended before entering into informational and identity diversity issues.*

This is primarily a pragmatic and empirical question – and for this reason a research topic. But in some of the published work on DI and in some unpublished ideas shared among trainers in the field, there are different arguments supporting this statement.

Ekelund & Maznevski (2008) and Ekelund, Shneor and Gehrke (2008) state that cultural differences raise issues where unconsciousness, emotions, language and identity are central. For this reason cultural clashes are not easy to discuss before a climate of trust is established (Ekelund, 2010). The positive trust components in the DI seminar are suggested to be composed of 8 distinct factors (Ekelund, 2013):

- I. Acknowledgement. This component is described in the Diversity Icebreaker – Personal Workbook (Ekelund & Rydningen, 2008) as a part of the Team Pyramid model (Ekelund, 2008). The central ideas are derived from Roger’s therapeutic models of acknowledgement for change, motivational theories of Self-enhancement and of the need for social approval. The socio-philosophical work of Honneth (1995) on the recognition theories strengthens this component from the moral socio-philosophical perspective. The main ideas are that perceived acknowledgement leads to a non-defensive and open mind modus. Both these components are important for change.
- II. Positive affect/humour. Shared humour in DI creates a shared understanding among the participants and facilitates interaction, dialogue and change. The positive

affect itself can be seen as a reinforcer in such a way that it strengthens the positive behaviours in the seminar it is a result of.

- III. Egalitarian model / Balanced Power. People with different colour preferences easily realise that they are dependent on each other. The seminars are organised in such a way that time, attention and positive self-understanding are balanced between the groups. The point of making even numbered groups despite local skewness in different directions adds a balanced image in the room. It is suggested that this egalitarian model promotes more open communication compared to situations where power is less well balanced. The use of Red, Blue and Green in the wording of negative feedback seems to be a contextualisation characterised by respect practised with reciprocal openness and humour.
- IV. Social Disclosure and Probing. Social disclosure has always been looked upon as a way to build trust. Especially when one shares personal vulnerability there will be an expectation to be treated well by the other. In the seminars we invite individuals and encourage groups to say more than what they would usually do in terms of self-bragging and negative stereotypes of others. We encourage them to convey this in a funny and entertaining way. This kind of “more-than-normal” openness concerning stereotypes induces vulnerability to criticism from the traditional, normative position. Social disclosure and probing happens in relation to people and groups represented in the seminar. A research question is to what degree this can have an effect outside the group of participants being involved in the seminar. What are the practical steps to be taken to make the learning more generalizable?
- V. Integration in the smaller and larger groups. The small groups of mono-coloured people instantly achieve in-group cohesion fuelled by shared perspectives and ideas. When the results are shared in the larger groups, all participants seem to understand that they need each other to be able

to ensure a high-quality problem solving capacity (which is reflected in discussions that follow after the seminar).

- VI. Continuity: trust due to predictability. The positive affect reinforces openness and dialogue-oriented behaviour and creates motivation to sustain it. The positive elements of belonging to a group, being acknowledged and communicating with a categorical system based upon egalitarian values are also the components that probably motivate to continue constructive interaction. This creates a shared desire for continuity and predictability – components of trust leading to future interaction and task-related processes.
- VII. Likeability across diversity. It is recognised that the people are attracted to those similar to themselves (Heider, 1958). In the Diversity Icebreaker model we create the same kind of attraction despite high-lighting the differences between Red, Blue and Green, by focusing on the need of the other and potential benefits of integrated work.
- VIII. Shared mental models of functional interaction. The shared model of interaction emerges as a consequence of generating positive ideas during the seminar. It is important for the participants to engage in and be aware of the sharing process and formulation of ideas on how these diversities can be utilised in a positive way.

In sum, we can say that the DI session creates a situation where people feel safer to voice their unique ideas, values and competences, because they expect to be treated in an egalitarian and acknowledging way with a positive interpersonal attitude and without being afraid of being discarded from the general group. This collective experience is openly and positively reinforced by the feeling of mastery and positive emotions. At the collective level, we state that this leads to a situation where it is easier to add on issues of a more emotional conflict-oriented character, like the cultural and identity differences.

## *2. Reality is constructed through communication.*

This happens in different stages. The first process of creating a description of the “reality”, the social construction of Red, Blue and Green, take place the first in the small groups: in the User Manual (Ekelund, 2010b) it is stated that the small groups utilise information partly from the questionnaire and partly from personal experience to construct the categories. Social agreement within the small groups functions as a confirmation. A natural process of social construction of categories and their meaning is being replicated and not only through a language game (Wittgenstein, 1953), but with a reference to the solid, existing beyond words reality (represented in the reliable and valid questionnaire), combined with personal experience and socially shared understanding between the participants. It replicates Habermas’ three worlds of reality: objective, personal, and social (Nørager, 1989). Whether this is a correct description or not is an important question for further research, but nonetheless this assumption has to be put forward as a statement for the integrated presentation of the Diversity Icebreaker.

The second stage of the social construction of Red, Blue and Green is orchestrated when the presentations are done between the groups and the actor-observer perspective becomes salient (Jones & Nisbett, 1972). When the main foci are on learning processes about social construction of categories and about prejudices and group dynamics, the sharing with laughter and the collective understanding that this is a natural result due to the process, are the last learning points before shifting topics. In real conflict resolution processes more time is spent on elaborating and revising perspectives through a dialogical process, which leads to a change that is more elaborately described in Matoba’s work on transformational dialogue (2011).

## *3. Social constructionism emphasises words and acts in interaction.*

Added in this point is the reference to the real world and individual and collective acts, as an interplay of construction and

reconstruction (Spano, 2001:46): “people act into patterns of interaction that have been created for them, and sometimes by them, and yet they can also change the pattern of communication depending on the specific actions they take together. Evanoff states that “individuals are capable of engaging in critical reflection on how the world is to be understood and acted in, and to thus transform existing social understanding and relationships” (1999:126).

In the Diversity Icebreaker seminar this is especially relevant for the fifth stage. Some of the articles that have been written about the interaction between word and act link this to power in two ways: the power to define what categories and language to use; and the power to take initiatives that comes out of groups that experience collective trust, speaking about difficult challenges more openly than normal and having the potential for organised decisions both on the language level as well as action level. This is a therapeutic and political processes combined – potentially, a kind of postcolonial revolution, taking the symbolic power through bottom up process (Orgeret, 2011; Romani, 2013).

Ekelund, Davcheva and Iversen (2009) describe the interaction between political theory and different paradigms in social sciences in the Diversity Icebreaker seminar. In the last paragraph of that paper they state:

We think that the different epistemological perspectives enable the participants to learn together both from a modernistic view of science (stage one and two of the seminar) as well as from the post-modern view (stage three). The meta-cognitive parts (stage four) and the discussions of what to do in the future (stage five) invite the participants to take an active position on how to understand social interaction and what to do tomorrow. The freedom to decide is an interesting position to take due to the classical opposition between the modernistic and the post-modernistic view. Is it possible to call this position a post post-modern position? Is it possible that we, as practitioners in these training and development sessions, can take an ethical position, act accountable, and leave behind the dilemma between these opposing academic views? The ability to formulate such questions is a consequence of integrating these three different

traditions and perspectives. Science develops when new questions are posed.

The links to post-colonial perspectives and the use of the Diversity Icebreaker in more politically oriented processes are the areas of importance for both research and practice (Orgeret, 2011, Sagiv et al, 2012).

#### *4. Unifying and diversifying are two interdependent processes.*

In the early work on the Diversity Icebreaker it was highlighted that all three categories – Red, Blue, and Green – were important in different ways in different stages during project work. The Gestalt concept was used (Ekelund, 2009a) but the reference point was on execution of tasks and not that clearly on individual or collective identity. Matoba's work and playfulness on the different aspects of "Unify and Diversify" (Matoba, 2011) together with student reflections (more of this later in this chapter) have highlighted the active process of diversifying in between individuals, in a way that at the same time expresses integration or unification at the collective level. In practice, you cannot say to the other, that "you are Green", without implying that "I need you, you belong to one out of three types that create our unity". Chinese students have pointed out the similarities with Yin and Yang – you cannot state one thing without stating something about the other. In the third stage of the seminar this is happening at the collective level, where groups see their uniqueness compared to others. Then the meaning of the categories emerges with a stronger focus on the polarities between the Red, Blue and Green groups.

The Yin and Yang model highlights the dilemma between two opposites. The Red, Blue and Green model is a trilemma construction. This is interesting from both a practical and theoretical perspective. In practice, you can play with 3 different roles, and the positions, alliances and power dynamics are richer with three than with two. This seems to give more opportunities to transform and change perspectives. From the theoretical perspective, one can introduce an observer's position on the inter-

action taking place between two others; e.g. a Red person can observe relationship development between a Blue and a Green person. The observer position towards a relationship is a complexity form that is more in line with social sciences inspired by social dynamics and communication – meaning system thinking in practice (Andersen, 1987). The observer's perspective on relationships is important in the third order cybernetics and is a very innovative practice in training and development of relationships (not only individuals), which is an important area for building third cultures.

It is our statement, to be tested in empirical research, that this type of trilemma facilitates training and development of system thinking, and leads to more advanced transformational processes with less rigidity than what we see in the polarization of two perspectives. It may be interesting both for research as well as experimental, pedagogical exercises.

5. *Third culture building implies that individuals bring their own schemata of cultural values and negotiate these cultural differences in relation to a joint chaotic environment.*

This is a statement about the processes in between people in a definite group that has an operational function. The cultural differences consist of more or less conscious values and preferred practices that individuals bring into the process. Some of these differences can be discussed in the formation of shared norms in order to avoid misunderstanding, assure integration and identification of utilization of cultural differences in task execution. Other differences of more unconscious character emerge as conflicting perspectives and unexpected actions materialize. This is the challenge of managing surprises in cross-cultural interaction and is the place where tacit knowledge and assumptions have a potential for being the platform for a meta-cognitive learning processes for all involved (Thomas et al, 2008).

Is this emerging system a self-organizing one? From a management point of view the question is how this could be orches-

trated upfront by kick-off processes, as well as by building individual and collective awareness, dialogue capabilities and arenas. We think that the introduction of Red, Blue and Green as meaningful categories, partly rooted in cognitive processes, negotiated socially and made meaningful in a local context; is an intervention that has impact in relation to how people perceive and use language, analyse problems and make decisions. This perspective represents the cognitive diversity aspect of Red, Blue and Green (Ekelund & Pluta, 2014). In practice we see that people talk about themselves and give each other feedback, explore perspectives together seen from the Red, Blue and Green perspectives and even suggest Red, Blue and Green processes in order to strengthen and compensate for skewness. It seems that participants use DI categories as perceptual filters referring to their own social and task oriented process. They seem to do this with the same positivity and high trust that has been described above. Seen from this perspective, the Diversity Icebreaker is an intervention forming perception and use of language in the third culture. The positive sides and high trust seems to reinforce the continual use in the new culture, as a tribal language developed by the participants themselves inside a predefined trilemma structure and with partly localized contextualization of the meaning of Red, Blue and Green.

## *6. Cognitive diversity models and the link between internal and external language*

We have given a thorough presentation of cognitive diversity perspectives seen from the tradition of third culture and the way it has been approached earlier by Matoba. There are different ways of punctuating cognitive processes, but they all vary around the processes of attention, perception, categorization, language, perceptual forms and communication; decision making, heuristics, and problem solving (Sternberg & Sternberg, 2012). Ekelund & Pluta (2014) due to the history of marketing development of Red, Blue and Green suggests a punctuation of cognitive processes; attention, perception, language, decision making and problem solving. There are pros and cons for different ways of punctuating this process and in our view it is difficult to judge what should

be the best way. However, it is important to underline that in the DI seminar Red, Blue and Green are not only individual processes differentiated by a personal questionnaire, but also a socially constructed system where participants apply the categories to the collective problems solving and execution. This process, which Moscovici call objectification and anchoring at the collective level (1984), constitute the acts that combine personal processes with collective language applied in teamwork. Combined with the process learning through reflection, it constitutes the process that links cognition at individual and collective level. It is also a process that links the internal and external language, which has not been addressed by the constructionist approach. It is our statement that the DI seminar merges these processes by creating an externally shared language combining elements from cognitive processes forming the internal language.

The Diversity Icebreaker seminar has explicit linkages in between the internal and external language, which Matoba has underlined as important for third culture building (2011). How can research be executed in a relevant way? Particular research hypotheses can be formulated, for example, around the general notion that the good alignment between individual qualities and shared mental constructs leads to better more effective problem solving.

## 7. *Cognitive diversity in management teams*

In the literature on management teams individual differences and distribution of tasks as a consequence of these differences have been an important issue (Belbin, 1981; Margerison & McCann, 1991). The Diversity Icebreaker might be looked upon as an alternative team roles model where the social construction of the categories is more salient than in the more classical psychological approaches. In the training material related to the Diversity Icebreaker this has been spelled out since the end of 90-ies (Ekelund & Jørstad, 1998, Ekelund & Jørstad, 2002, Ekelund, 2009b). It is important to create a common understanding within a team in regard to how the diversity should be utilised. The hypothesis suggested in this literature around a model called *Team*

*Pyramid* is that in order to achieve synergy of individual differences in team work, you have to:

- Create an acknowledgement culture that make even the non-dominant perspectives accessible for team discussion, which means making individuals feel safe voicing opposing and alternative views.
- Balance the dynamics of similarities for cohesion and differences for critical thinking and creativity
- Create a sensible and shared understanding about when, how and to what purpose the individual perspectives and competences should be used.

Our research hypothesis is that management teams that are trained with this perspective, using the Diversity Icebreaker as a starting point, with experiential learning around these issues, will be more productive, both for innovation and efficiency (Ekelund, 2009).

This linkage to team work has implications for how research can be set up concerning outcome variables. Under what contexts will a shared cognitive diversity model lead to more productive team work? In such a way there are linkages made possible between individual characteristics, mental models, “third cultures” and productivity. It should be a promising avenue for research.

### ***Discussion – research issues***

In the process of “third culture building” using the Diversity Icebreaker we have in this chapter pointed out practical and theoretical perspectives that legitimize the use of the Diversity Icebreaker for the purpose of integrating people from different cultures into a new shared “third culture”. There are some research questions that are worth to be tested empirically by defining Diversity Icebreaker process as an intervention. Some of the ques-

tions are not easy to test empirically, but invite to apply a more elaborative qualitative methodology. To each of the seven points mentioned above we suggest these seven research questions:

Is it better to introduce shared understanding of cognitive diversity models before introducing the diversity of personal and social identities?

An exploratory study of how the meaning of the categories emerges during the seminar has not been done yet. Are the processes described by Habermas and Moscovici the best descriptive model of what is happening?

How and in what ways do the Diversity Icebreaker processes empower groups both to take control of language and manifest powerful actions outside the seminar per se?

Does the trilemma structure of Red, Blue and Green create an integrating force, both for the “people processes” as well as for perspectives in problem solving?

Will the degree of trust promote more open dialogues / tri-alogues where outside perspectives promote learning about tacit knowledge and foster an integration of both explicit and implicit values into the new “h”?

Concerning internal and external language: is there a good fit between internal self-understanding of Red, Blue and Green and the use of these categories in social processes?

Does an introduction of Red, Blue and Green as a team role concept lead to better productivity and innovation?

These research questions have to be studied with different research paradigms. There is an on-going research being done in some of these areas. Co-operation between researchers from different areas has been an important part of the innovation processes behind the Diversity Icebreaker. For those interested: contact us and we will share updated research results and further ideas.

### **Part 3: Case – “third culture building” with the Diversity Icebreaker**

This case is written by one of Kazuma Matoba’s Chinese students in Frankfurt after a group process where students create an artificial company – and they use the Diversity Icebreaker in the beginning of this work-shop in order to create a platform of diversity before starting the work. We let this case description stand alone as an illustration seen from a student’s point of view, based upon the experiences in applying the Diversity Icebreaker.

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I have experienced the Diversity Icebreaker in a two-day workshop in diversity management at Frankfurt School of Finance and Management. Before this workshop I have never heard about the diversity management and this workshop gave me a different perspective to see the diversity in organization and society.

The whole class, the original group, was divided into three colour groups according to the results of the Diversity Icebreaker questionnaire. This is the first stage of the whole process which causes the recognition of the diversity. The second stage is a group reflection within each, newly formed group upon the positive sides and the negative sides of the own group as well as of the other two groups. This stage leads to a reflection about the diversity and an open, tolerant and unprejudiced attitude toward others who are different. Moreover, it helps the participants to gain a diversity competence. The third stage is a process of communication between groups. In this stage the participants reach the consensus that diversity needs to be unified in order to pursue better performance of the whole class with more efficiency, creativity and competence. A new “third culture” thus has been constructed.

## ***Background: Identity Diversity***

Identity diversity is significant in the class as it is composed of both male students and female students with different nationalities, ethnicities, religion etc. For instance, the class has students from Germany, China, Mexico, and Nigeria – thus has different ethnicities. The students could be representatives of different cultures because despite the visible differences, such as gender and colour of skin, cultural differences cause them to feel, think and behave differently. As a matter of fact, the existence of identity diversity can be easily observed and sensed by the students and they have tried their way to deal with it, positively or negatively. However, conflict could occur easily in this intercultural environment of the original group. When the group is viewed as a whole or facing a common goal, the efficiency could be restricted by this diversity without an appropriate management.

## ***Stage One – Recognizing Diversity***

This stage is the process of self-reflection. The participant is supposed to answer the questionnaire and be categorized into a colour type, Blue, Red or Green, according to the final score of his preferences as the three colours have their theoretical background in cognitive differences. Subsequently, the participants of the same colour form a new group – thus there are three groups: a Blue group, Red group and Green group. Tacitly, each group does not have the same number of members.

Belonging in the same group does not necessarily mean homogeneity but indicates that the members share something in common, such as similar personality traits or the way they think and communicate. For example, the Blue type who has a comparatively practical personality tends to think logically and communicate concisely and to the point. Also he would like suggestions that are direct and practical. In contrast, the green type who often has a need for variety and broader perspectives might overlook practical details and like suggestions that are creative and unusual.

Although the process tries to suspend the identity diversity, the influence of identity does not disappear. Instead, it is translated into a cognitive form. For instance, almost all the Chinese students are categorized into the Blue group as they tend to be practical and rational. But they are not Chinese here anymore, they are Blue. In fact, the new formed group is already an integration of diversity thus – a new culture. In this new culture, the participants share some common attributions and communicate with each other upon a common goal – to accomplish the following task. Therefore, the three colour groups could be seen to have three different cultures. However, the key point of this stage is not to tell how different the cultures are but to bring the awareness of cognitive diversity. Eventually, all members recognize the existence of diversity and respect it.

### ***Stage Two – Group reflection***

This stage is the process of group reflection about the “positive” and “negative sides” of group’s colour as well as those of the two other. Tables 1 and 2 present the Blue and Red reflections (next page):

**Table 1***The group reflection of the Blue Group*

Blue	Blue group	Red group	Green group
Merits (good sides)	rational and practical logical and precise; goal oriented, structured; well prepared	pursue harmony; positive; passionate; enthusiasm	good at discovering opportunities and finding solutions; contextual thinking
Demerits (negative sides)	lack of innovation and creativity; not emotional, no humour; too serious, think too much	unrealistic; unstable; less commitment	not practical, unrealistic; worry too much; can't handle criticism

**Table 2***The group reflection of the Red Group*

Blue	Blue group	Red group	Green group
Merits (good sides)	N/A	openness; good communication skills; respectful and tolerant; socializing, passionate, and enthusiastic; team players	creative and innovative; not restricted to/ by situations; functional flexibility;
Demerits (bad sides)	N/A	avoid conflicts; decisions not based on facts; low efficiency; not goal oriented; easily influenced	unrealistic; bad interpersonal skills; blind eye to facts and details; too multi-tasking

According to these tables, the three groups all have an open attitude without prejudice to discover the strengths and weaknesses of themselves and others. For instance, the Blue group's description of the Red group as passionate and enthusiastic fits the red group's self-image. The reflection also indicates that although every type has its strength, no colour type is perfect. The Blue type is rational and practical but lacks innovation and creativity. The Green type is creative and innovative but unrealistic. Assume that the descriptions of Blue group as realistic and goal-oriented; Red group as not-goal-oriented; and the Green group as unrealistic are objective. It's easy to predict that conflicts, at least tensions, would be caused when the three groups work together toward a common goal if without enough mutual understanding and adaptation.

Additionally, there are two points to be noted. Firstly, these judgments have been made from the view-point of cognitive diversity despite the identity diversity such as race and gender. The descriptions such as "rational" and "contextual thinking" are made from the perspective of cognition. This is an important sign of diversity competence. Secondly, being aware of own strength, especially unique strength, is essential for an individual to keep himself different. While being aware of self-limit and others' strength, an individual would have to work with and learn from others. And this is the reason why diversity is important for a creatively efficient group (or organization). When a colour group finishes this reflection process with an open and learning attitude, the group is expected to have gained its diversity competence and ready for integration.

### ***Stage Three - Group Dialogue***

In this stage, the three groups communicated with each other to discuss both the merits and the demerits of each colour and what they could learn from other groups. They eventually reach the consensus on the attributions of an ideal type – a combination of Blue, Red and Green. The idea that the combination of merits of the three groups would be preferable will come up naturally as

they are complementary to each other. The Green group's creativity would be a good complement to Blue group. The combination, in other words, an integration of diversity has greater potential to allow the whole group to perform better and more efficiently when being creative.

In the process of this intercultural communication, the three groups arrive at an adequate mutual understanding. On the basis of this understanding, as well as openness, tolerance and respect, a consensus has been reached. Under this consensus, diversity, which has been respected and valued, is integrated into a unity. The conflicts have been shifted into positive solutions and the original group, the class, has been changed into a better integrated one. Thus, a "third culture" has been built.

"The diversity should be unified" – the author, having a Chinese cultural background, has been enlightened by these words and will always have a tolerant and open attitude toward the individuals or minds that are different. But still sometimes, it is hard to avoid conflicts caused by diversity. The Diversity Ice-breaker workshop provides a new way of thinking about the diversity. During the process, we are trying to abandon prejudices and negative stereotyping by suspending identity diversity and constructing cognitive diversity. Therefore, we are able to step outside our own culture with mutual understanding and respect by communication. With competent communication, consensus can be reached, and thus a new "third culture", in which diversity is unified, could be built. In this "third culture building" process, we are able to unleash the positive potential of diversity and establish better personal relationships as well as a better organization.

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