

CASE STUDY (9)

APPLICATION OF TRIALOGUING IN A FOLLOW-UP COMMUNICATION TRAINING

Consultants/case authors:

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Areas:

communication training

Brief

In the present case the tool was used in a three-hour seminar session for thirty-six members of a project within the oil and gas industry. The participants had both diverse cultural as well as professional backgrounds, with different seniority in the project.

The following aims were given for the three-hour session:

1. The main objective was to create a positive teambuilding experience, which would create energy and enthusiasm for working together in the project,
2. with an additional focus being on building a communicational competence.

Action

Part 1

During the first one and half hour the classical Diversity Icebreaker workshop was conducted.

It energised the group and elicited a good deal of shared humour, constituting a good basis for a positive event remembered by all the participants. Furthermore, it defined the local meaning of Red, Blue and Green and thus established a shared language to discuss differences, crucial for the follow-up exercises in part two. Lastly, the fourth stage of the workshop – discussion about “what have we learnt” – opened the group towards reflection and learning, an inclination adequate for developing a communicational competence.

A fifteen-minute pause followed the classical Diversity Icebreaker workshop.

Part 2

During the remaining time in the session, an exercise focused on communication was conducted. It was introduced as the fifth stage and prolongation of the classical workshop; not focused on the “implications for tomorrow” however, but due to the limited time and focus of the session, presented as a practical training exercise.

The group received structured tasks and the activities were organised as follows:

1. Work in one-colour groups (same as in the classical workshop; in this case there were six groups – two per colour – six participants per group). Purpose with this stage was to prepare a general communication strategy.

Task given to the groups:

You have to convince a person to contribute to organising of a kick-off for an IT project.

How would you approach the other and convey your message in order to create interest in a Red, Blue and a Green person?

Time: 15 minutes.

2. Work in small, multi-colour groups (groups of one Red, one Blue and one Green participant; the Blue participants were given the task to form the groups, i.e. find one Red and one Green person). Purpose here was to practice communication strategies and receive feedback.

Task given:

Try out the strategies you had developed in your-colour groups with other colours. Structure the interaction so that two colours converse and the third observes, looks for cues for smart interactive moves and give feedback to the partners afterwards (trialoguing):

- *Red interacts with Green; Blue observes.*
- *Green interacts with Blue; Red observes.*
- *Blue interacts with Red; Green observes.*

Time: 30 minutes (10 minutes per turn)

3. Work in the original, one-colour groups. Purpose with this stage was to share experiences and feedback one has received when interacting with other colours and come up with learning points.

Task given:

Use the feedback and your experience from interacting with other colours in triads to extract learning points from the exercise. Write them on flip-charts.

Time: 15 minutes

4. Presentation of the learning points in plenum. Discussion and sharing of the collective learning points. Closing of the session.

Time: 15 minutes

Results

The results of the classical Diversity Icebreaker workshop conducted in the first part of the session for this group included: enhancing openness, positive affect and enthusiasms. They were aligned with the main objective of a session, i.e. creating a positive teambuilding event.

The results of the communication exercise in the second part of the session include knowledge creation in terms of communication strategies and techniques, as well as having actively practiced this knowledge in real interactions.

Best way to depict these results is to present excerpts from the flip-charts the one-colour groups presented in the last, fourth part of the session (taken verbatim from the flip-charts the groups worked on):

Red group

Learning [points]:

- *Certain elements tick*
- *Easier when you know the person's colour → how you approach is different*
- *"Green people" will do anything for you!*
- *The approach has to be natural*

Blue group

0. PREPARE A PLAN
1. *Consider personality of the person you approach*
2. *Smalltalk*
3. *Approach the other's strengths / vanity*
4. *Facts / frame*
5. *Identify "what's in it for the other person"*

Green group

- *Playing on the right strings works. "More is more"*
- *Preparation is important*
- *Blue need well defined tasks. Triggered by competence. Comfort zone [is important to be respected]*
- *Red triggered by receiving support and safety. Flattered by nice words. Presentation is important.*

About the authors:

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](#) and visit his [blog about Diversity Icebreaker](#).



Piotr Pluta is an organizational psychologist, with a position of a consultant in Human Factors AS. He is involved in the developmental processes taking place around the concept and employs it in his consultative work. He has also developed a humour workshop.

