

N°11-2 – May 2011

## Editorial

Sometimes, HR departments find it hard to convince other operational or functional departments to train their teams on intercultural management subjects. This may happen even though these departments (IT, Finance, Audit, Marketing, R&D...) have already been exposed to international projects involving 5 to 10 different cultures around the world.

This is exactly what happened recently with a major International customer, in its EMEA region. The new regional Information Technology EVP and the IT top management team had been searching for a solution to renew their yearly convention. Indeed feed-back from participants from previous years had generally been mediocre, with a decline over the last 2 years. The only thing participants seemed to like about it was the opportunity to speak with colleagues from other countries outside the official sessions.

The top management decided to rejuvenate the event completely. The HR team was on-board and suggested that, while the seminar had to re-focus on IT strategy and IT major projects, it also needed to address a number of international (mis)communication and management issues. The theme **"Working more effectively in multicultural teams"** soon became obvious.

We, meaning the IT management team, the HR team and Managing Worldwide, managed a significant turn-around: from a boring, top-down, cold, technical seminar, we created "the best convention ever" as quite a few participants put it.

We are happy to share a precious recipe with you.



**Laurent Lepez, Associate Partner**

**building unity /  
through diversity**

## How to turn your 'Department's annual convention' into a major hit? **Weaving an intercultural thread**

by Matthew Hill & Dominika Hirsch, Senior Consultants

### 1-Logistics and people: some constraints

Managers from all over the Region met for a day and a half, in a time format allowing most of them to fly in the first day and fly back the day after.

#### 1-Logistics and people: some constraints



- ☐ 100 IT people from 11 countries in EMEA Region
- ☐ 1 1/2 day together, from Tuesday 1:00 pm to Wednesday 4:30 pm
- ☐ One single large auditorium, no split rooms
- ☐ Capacity to sit: 10 tables of 10 people

Page 2

### 2-Past experiences

Everyone in the IT department knew that a few obstacles from the past had to be overcome.

#### 2-Past experience : until 2010



- ☐ Convention deemed: "top down lectures only", "boring", "no vision", "nothing new"
- ☐ Very satisfied + satisfied: 27%
- ☐ The best thing: "coffee breaks + dinner + night"
- ☐ Tensions between several countries: us & them syndrome could materialize

Page 3

## How to turn your annual convention into a major hit?

### Weaving an intercultural thread (continued)

#### 3-Main thread: working in multicultural teams

While the top management wanted to re-focus on IT strategy and IT major projects, such as what was done 5 or 6 years ago, the Regional HR team insisted that international (mis)communication and management issues should be addressed. The theme "Working more effectively in multicultural teams" soon emerged, with HR convinced that it should be just one more lecture. This is where we entered the picture, proposing a truly lively and bottom-up experiential learning experiment.

#### 4-a crucial role: the XCF's

The corner stone of this success lay in the identification of 10 carefully targeted operational IT managers who played the role of **XCF's : Cross-Cultural Facilitators**.

#### 4-a crucial role: the XCF's

- ❑ **Why:** 10 people fully involved, well trained and future ambassadors
- ❑ **How:** speed training 4 hours
- ❑ **When:** the half-day before the convention
- ❑ **Role 1<sup>st</sup> part:** observe first the multicultural team at work on IT subjects
- ❑ **Role 2<sup>nd</sup> part:** report to its team and facilitate the 2nd meeting in order to build a consensus about what needs to be improved as a MCT

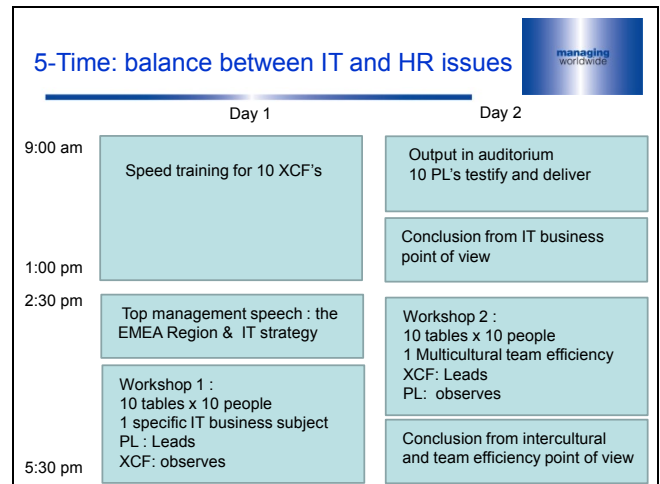
Page: 4

**My experience:** Matthew Hill – London, U.K.

What I particularly appreciated in this convention is how 100 participants could relate instantly to the tools we provided them, based on their past experience working in in multicultural teams.

#### 5-Time structure: balance between IT and HR issues

The time structure was thought out so that the intercultural issues could be intimately interwoven with the business subjects that needed to be addressed.



#### 6-Outstanding results: facts and figures again

It may sound awfully immodest, but outstanding results were achieved. Instant measurement showed results never seen before: Very satisfied + Satisfied: 93%

The "Intercultural" subject came way above the "IT strategy" and the "major projects" choices, even though these topics were clearly appreciated too. We also heard and could read after the seminar many sentences like "the best convention ever".

**My experience:** Dominika Hirsch – Barcelona, Spain

What I particularly appreciated during the convention is the confidence that the 10 XCF's gained over time. That was truly impressive and was in part due to the support they received from their colleagues, including the project leaders.