

Converting Team Diversity into an Asset and a Competitive Advantage

An Example from Romania

Initial Situation

The current Romanian economic scenery consists of a substantial number of foreign (German, Austrian, American, English, French, Italian, Indian, Arabian, etc) daughter companies that are producing in Romanian cities and employing Romanians. As many of these companies are still in the start-up phase, the executive teams in the lead are very diverse from the point of view of the cultural background of their members. This generates an additional challenge to that of achieving quality and quantity targets.

Statistically speaking, about 40% of the working time of employees is invested in solving conflicts. Cultural diversity can increase this percentage to a minimum of 50%. The cultural background brings with it - and with each individual - a way of doing things: a way of solving problems, a way of communicating, a way of leading people, a way of making requests and expressing one's opinion, a way of taking decisions, a way of holding meetings, a way of reaching goals, a way of giving feedback (if any), a way of motivating people, a way of planning, a way of delegating and a way of building trust.

In culturally mixed teams the main symptoms that CONTUR could perceive as a consequence of cultural diversity are:

- team members tend to act on individual basis, focusing solely on own departmental goals, sometimes missing to see the interdependence between all departmental goals;
- teams are subdivided into smaller groups polarizing around informal leaders, or according to culture;

- substance of relationships is mainly professional;
- trust therefore can be found mainly in the subgroups of the team,
- meetings are sometimes carried out in order to find the person responsible for a certain situation rather than looking for a solution or taking a decision.
- the usual, normal way of working is the firefighting, re-active mode

To sum up, operational work and the sudden increase of the number of projects hardly ever leave time for planning or for creating a team culture.

So the natural question following this description is: How can this team diversity be fructified and converted into an asset and a competitive advantage?

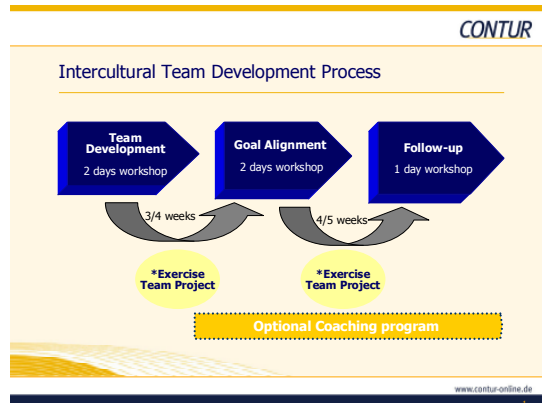
Let us see, how CONTUR's concept looked like to match the specific needs of this customer's request.

Converting Team Diversity into an Asset and a Competitive Advantage can be achieved by getting the team to agree and commit to "this is how we do things around here" (in OUR team). But what does this really mean and how can that be achieved?

Please see next page for CONTUR's tailor-made approach...

CONTUR's approach:

In this specific case we suggested a modular process consisting of three modules:



The first workshop aimed to offer the framework for the team members to experience and become aware what it means to act as team and not as a group of individuals. It focused on building trust, identifying the unique role of each team member and their value inside the team. In addition, it clarified expectations the team members have from each other and offers them the chance to create their team culture in terms of communication, e.g. meetings, giving feedback, making a point, decision taking.

Opening the channels of communication, building trust and a feeling of belonging represented the output of the first workshop.

The second workshop aimed at aligning the efforts of the team members in the direction of the same goals, the common goals of the location they are leading by supporting them in developing the right strategies for improving their solution orientation competence and understanding who is the main client

for all of them.

Throughout both workshops the connecting and recurrent topics were those of understanding the benefits of doing things in a certain way (due to national or organizational culture) and establish the common way of doing things for the team in question.

The process not only offered the chance for the team members to get aware of certain aspects, theoretically, but was designed to give them the opportunity to practice their strategies, guidelines and common way of doing things during a Team Project that they needed to implement in the company during the process.

This activity insured the transfer of the topics addressed in the workshops into real life and the feeling of ownership of the project on the side of the participants and their commitment.

The optional coaching program came – on demand - to support the participants who were new to the team and whose youth and little experience in management might have needed more individual and customized accompaniment in order to find their place in the team, to define and design their role and improve their management tools and techniques.

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