

## How to improve Expat Effectiveness?

### Results of survey

In support of a recent workshop for the Expat Center Amsterdam, we conducted a small scale survey among our audience. The two main conclusions of this survey were:

- Expats are active on all organizational levels of the companies they work for, from the Board to line management;
- Regardless of the organizational level, all expats are confronted with a gap in business culture which diminishes their effectiveness.

This second conclusion is confirmed by international research. This means that the gap in business culture as the main obstacle to expat effectiveness is a global phenomenon.

International research also shows that when trying to eliminate or at least to diminish this main obstacle, it is not enough to focus only on the expat. A wider perspective is required in order to improve effectiveness.

### Rule #1. 80% of expat effectiveness depends on business team support.

One cannot expect expats to be productive in total isolation. He or she needs all the support of team members they can provide. From implementation of job tasks to communication with peers and clients.

### Rule #2. Team members need excellent business culture competencies.



Because the gap between business cultures is the main obstacle, all team members (including the expat) need competencies to build bridges across this gap.

We define a business culture as the way a group of people is used to earn a living (e.g. to collaborate in a team, to serve clients or to close deals with business partners). Business cultures come in all shapes and sizes.

Examples are project team cultures, specific organizational cultures (e.g. Shell, Philips), local cultures (e.g. City of Maastricht), economic sector cultures (e.g. Banking sector) or national cultures (Dutch, Chinese or American).

Business culture competencies are those competencies necessary for bridging the cultural gap. Examples are the ability to:

- Observe and become aware of one's own and other people's culture;
- Build productive relationships with people of other business cultural backgrounds;
- Identify commonalities between two or more different business cultures;

- Appreciate other values and norms;
- Integrate some of these other values and norms into your own value system;
- Create a new common business culture

**Rule #3. Team managers need international leadership skills.**

To facilitate this process of bridging the gap, team managers need to act as a facilitator or coach. They need to create a team atmosphere of open-mindedness, empathy, dialogue, shared values, inclusion and team learning.

**Rule #4. 80% of team effectiveness depends on organizational support.**

What applies to an individual also applies to a team. One cannot expect a team to be productive in total isolation. It needs all the support it can get from members of the Board, line management and staff departments.

As a staff department, Human Resources can support these teams by helping the team members to develop business cultural competencies. Management development programmes or Corporate Social Responsibility programmes could include special training provided by internal or external experts. Individual or team coaching is a very effective tool to develop business cultural competencies.

**How to create awareness of differences?**

The first step in developing these competencies is to create awareness of cultural differences. Raising awareness of your own and other team members' business culture can be done with a simple tool as shown in figure 1.

Figure 1.

Management	Your team	Common ground	Expat
<b>Planning</b>	General		Detailed
<b>Meeting</b>	Flexible agenda		Fixed agenda
<b>Decision-making</b>	Democratic		Autocratic
<b>Implementing</b>	Personal initiative		Limited to instructions
<b>Reviewing</b>	Direct feedback		Indirect feedback

The team needs to get together and discuss what its dominant ways of collaboration are. Figure 1. shows a number of aspects of team management, such as planning and meeting, and some dominant features of the (Dutch) team members collectively and the expat individually regarding each aspect.

In new teams, each team member will probably need a separate column to identify his or her dominant business cultural features.

Figure 1. is the first step of a four step process for which we have designed a unique Coaching Model. With this model we help our clients build bridges across business cultures and eventually to create a new common team culture.

In the next edition of our enewsletter (Winter 2010) we will pay attention to this Model and its benefits to expats and international teams in improving effectiveness.



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