

Professional Expats and Team Performance

Part 1: The challenge of team diversity

Team diversity

Many companies in the Netherlands recruit highly skilled professionals (knowledge migrants) to add expertise to their management or project teams. The three largest groups of migrants originate from India, United States and China. According to the IND Monitor on Knowledge Migrants 2008, their expertise is highly valued by Dutch (inter) national companies in economic sectors like IT, Industry and Professional Services.

Although their expertise may be highly valued, having foreign experts on the management or project team of your company will not automatically enhance team performance. There are several reasons.

Knowledge migrants will not only add their well developed skills to your team, they will also increase its diversity. Diversity is a valuable asset for any team as (inter) national research has shown.

But team performance and effectiveness largely depend on interpersonal dynamics. Bridging the cultural differences between foreign professionals and native Dutch team members will require well developed intercultural skills by all team members, including the knowledge migrant. When these intercultural skills are not sufficiently available, your team performance and effectiveness might even decrease instead of increase.

Leadership challenge

International research has also shown that diverse teams perform better only when they are managed well. This will impose extra responsibilities on the team manager. The challenge for him or her is to provide leadership to highly educated professionals *and* to create cohesion in a diverse team at the same time. That is quite a challenge.

No team operates in a vacuum. So, a basic level of intercultural skills is also required by the rest of your organization. That leads to the following situation. In increasing order, the organization at large, the team members, including the knowledge migrant, and the team manager will need to acquire sufficient team and intercultural skills.

That learning process will continue as long as your company will recruit foreign professionals, because each new foreign team member will add to the diversity of your team.

When your company is able to manage this combined challenge well, it will get an optimal return on its investment in highly skilled professional expats.



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