

# reference project

## Against each other or together?

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How we supported a global company with specialized production units in the transportation industry to master the challenge of global cooperation.

### Initial situation and concerns

Triggered by the headquarters of the German mother we were invited by the Spanish CEO to support the global leadership-team in transferring their mission and vision of global cooperation to the different sites and to bridge cultural gaps by really integrating the sites into a global group.

The group was just stuck in the middle of a hard savings-program, after the numbers of this daughter had remained red in the Group over the years. The profound economic transformation should now be supplemented by a cultural change project.

They wanted to concentrate this project on the main sites in Australia, Asia and Europe. The situation by that point was that - due to different local culture and habits - each site still perceived the others as competitors, which deeply hindered them in collaborating in an effective manner. Many of them had just been acquired a few years ago and still perceived themselves as belonging to their former brand. The new and common brand still was to be defined.

The cooperation amongst the locations was extremely difficult. Asians, Europeans and Australians worked with complete different processes and standards of quality. The communication about it was

compounded by the language barrier and cultural differences. The employees of the three locations got all excited over each other – it were always the others to blame... In addition Europeans and Australians were worried that the Asians might take over their jobs in the long term, when everything might be replaced to Asia.

The international leadership team was newly put together and not yet noticeable. We realized later, during the rollout, that many employees didn't even know the CEO. Everywhere the national identity and logic was predominant.

The concern of the leadership-team was, to overview also the soft-facts of the big transformation phase with the cultural project. They realized, that a savings-program alone would not solve their problems. The locations should not compete against each other but work together against the real competitors. In our first coaching, we developed the following goals: That they see and use their strengths and differences and to synchronize the process- and quality-standards on the long term so they can develop a WE-feeling, which also should be noticeable. The leadership team carried this impulse out of the first coaching.

### Diagnose-Phase

We started with the diagnose phase. Key persons of all locations, which have been named by the leadership team, were interviewed. It was about

their perception of the current situation and challenges.

The principal points they communicated confirmed our first assumptions: The processes weren't harmonized; there was no common quality standard. Everybody defended his own kingdom. There was little mutual understanding of the cultures of the other locations and often great language barriers.

We started with a diagnosis phase and interviewed key people from all sites, who were proposed by the members of the leadership team. They told us about the actual situation and tensions they perceived.

The main issues that came up again proved our assumptions: unaligned processes and quality standards, claim management, lack of mutual understanding and language skills, intercultural barriers.

As an integral part of our work with organizations, we formed hypotheses within the consultant-staff, to develop a common picture of the dynamics of the system and to detect potential leverage and pitfalls.

### **Our hypotheses**

All signs pointed out that from the viewpoint of the organization, this project might be perceived as a pure culture project imposed from above and at best 'nice-to-have'.

Since the focus was fully on the transformation project and the savings-plan, we considered it essential to stay close to the economic perspective, if we want to make a sustainable difference and generate energy for the project. It had to become clear, that in this case, the soft factors such as cooperation have a data relevant influence.

We assumed that the workforce was still scared stiff, whether the austerity program would have an impact on jobs. It got worse as rumors circulated that production could be shifted completely to Asia in the long term

We were wondering if there would be enough energy for the project in the system. With the intense economic turnaround many consultants had been in the house. We experienced the workforce as "advisory tired" and knew that we had to place selected interventions if we wanted to achieve commitment to the project.

Our assumption was that the project only could succeed if we take these fears seriously and provide an opportunity to take a critical and honest look at themselves and their own cultural patterns.

In order to build up trust and understanding we thought of inviting everybody to try a change in perspective, thus answering to some circular questions. Just like putting on the other's shoes: How does the cooperation look like from the Asian sight? What do the Australian think about us? Which prejudices do we have against the Europeans and how does this affect our actions?

### **Co-Creation**

We presented our thoughts to the leadership team. The challenge was to overcome their ambivalent attitude against us. They had to hire us because the German parent company told them to. However, slowly they discovered our utility and impact on the system. They got familiar with our systemic approach and started to appreciate it.

They were impressed by the depth of our diagnosis and felt taken by our hypothesis. At the same time, new perspectives on their own system came clear that they had never seen in their previous management-tune.

Together we developed a fitting design to approach a change in this situation. We decided to go for a road-show at the main locations during the summer and to have a final workshop with the management team to wrap up the results and to plan further steps to foster the change.

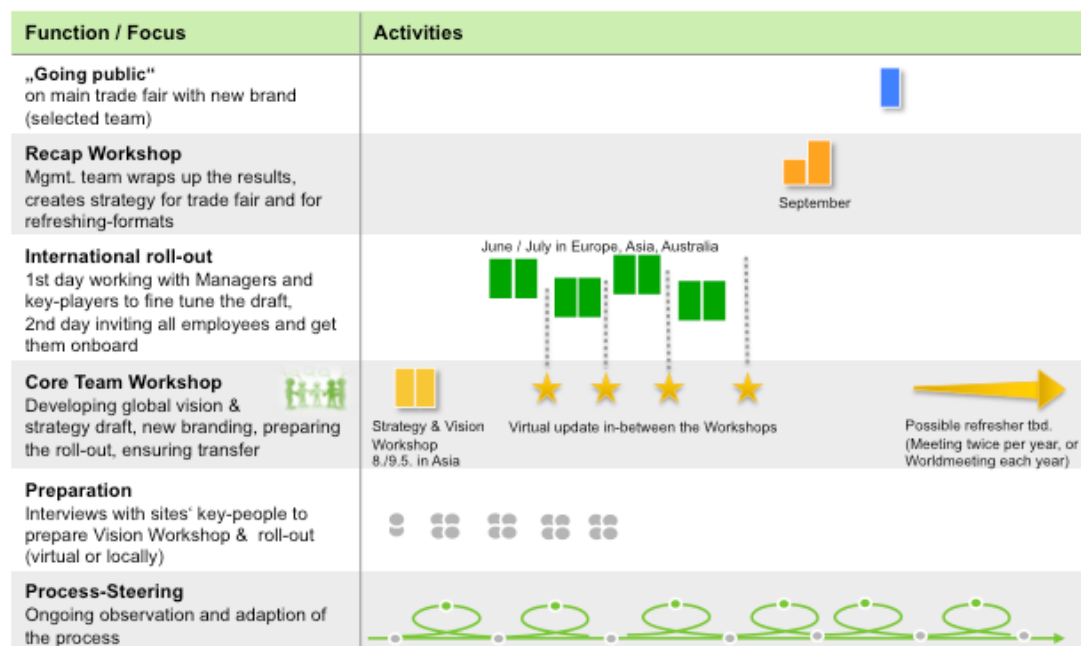
The ambitious aims were:

- Create a global vision and basic strategy
- Unify the group's branding
- Get all sites and employees involved and engaged
- Foster a group wide team spirit
- Turn into an integrated group for global activity

We developed the following architecture and integrated the systemic intervention-level (control/decisions, content, communication, sounding, evaluation)

## Architecture of the project

### Timeline



### Implementation / Adaption

We had a good plan but it was crisscrossed by life. The leadership team didn't decide for a long time and missed the moment, to let us moderate the strategy workshop. The Kick-off for the changing process wasn't used properly as momentum. The result of

the team-meeting without supervision was a strong number-based vision, which would arouse little emotion or commitment among employees, so our guess.

The missing emotion and attractiveness for the vision had to be

transported now via stories and pictures.

We started the rollout at the European site with 50 selected key people who were there to act as ambassadors for the entire workforce (250 employees). The themes of the workshop were Top-Line-Growth and Cooperation. Contrary to the fears of the leadership team, we were able to bring the participants quickly into the boat. The unusual nature of an interactive workshop was the centerpiece on self- and cultural reflection, which exactly hit the bull's eye.

After the dialogue with the leadership team, we brought the different pictures of the situation in a statement down to earth. In form of Innovation Labs, the group then had the chance to break down the global vision on their own area with the question: How do we create, alongside the hard cuts of the saving-program, also new growth?

In the second part for cooperation, the participants were invited to take part in a carousel format of diverse cultural perspectives. The AH-effect was big - for the first time they had been working on a meta-level with internal and external views. Consolidating the results it became obvious how the cultural prejudices and fears largely prevented from collaboration and productivity.

In an interview with international guests suddenly came clear, that they had a common goal. The emerging solidarity made readiness available: to reveal the misunderstandings among themselves and to find solutions together.

With creative and witty videos they recorded messages for the other locations, which we, as ambassadors, took on our Road show.

In the closing they defined, how they, as change agents, can pass on and anchor the conclusions and developments. Their job for the next day was, to inform the staff in small groups and to gather all the questions and feedback.

So the next midday all 300 employees came already informed and involved to our big-group event. The leadership-team presented again officially Vision and Mission, explained the institutionalization of the change agents and how the project will move on worldwide.

With these videos in our luggage we went on the trip to Asia and then to Australia, where we held workshops, similar to the pilot with key people and the total workforce. At both locations, the sensitization of key people for the subject succeeded as well as the involvement of the workforce. While we were afraid, that the Asian people would not take on such an open reflection of cultures, we experienced the exact opposite – brave and joyfully they jumped into the game with clichés, stereotypes and as well in the critical look at themselves.

In Australia strongly ruled the mind of the predecessor company that was bought by the Germans. Here our fear was, whether we would be able to activate the Australian misfits to work on the global brand. The format of our large group workshops and the high, lusty, yet even honest participation that appeared have been the recipe to crack the minds. They wouldn't let us go on the second day.

### **Mission accomplished?**

The recap-workshop with the leadership-team again took place in Europe. The team was still highly pleased with the result. Suddenly there

were entirely different messages from the locations: the Asians answered now on E-mails, there were initiatives to organize functional global meetings, job-rotation programs were wanted and the first global projects were already started. The change agents were active and wanted deliberately to help shape the change and link the locations more.

Unfortunately the leadership team was tired. The meeting took place after 4 days of an intense conclave. The tight process and the road show around the world still had an effect. Through the developments in the market and the strategic decisions, which were made in Asia, they all were sunken in the operative work. They failed to keep the attention on the project. Too many "new swine" were again driven through the village.

So one of the learnings from this project is a more conscious timing of the recaps. What does it take after such a tense process to be again capable of work as a core team? From our point of view, the phase of change that began after the roadshow is the decisive one.

Now the Spirit can anchor and for this, it needs attention and a systemic overall view. In the recap, we were not able to make them aware of the importance of process architecture for sustainable change.

At this point, the circle was completed. Shirt sleeved and operationally overloaded they moderated the kick-off even themselves and so they left out the level of reflection. Even if it hurts the counselor's heart when such decisions are made, it is still visible that the change still affects and is sustainable. Manager of the countries report that the culture of cooperation has improved sustainably and from this products and customers also benefit. One of them wrote to us still being amazed: "It's crazy that a single workshop with the right questions was able to trigger all of that!"