ICOPROMO

Intercultural competence for professional mobility
*Compétence interculturelle pour le développement
de la mobilité professionnelle*

Preferences

Awareness of the Self and the Other

Rationale

Personal preferences are to a great extent the result of personal values and are reflected in an individual's behaviour. Since values are shaped by primary and secondary socialization, they are different depending on the individual's socio-cultural environment. In multicultural teams, chances are high that there are major discrepancies between the preferences of the individual team members. Working together successfully in diverse teams requires awareness of these differences and managing them in a mutually satisfactory way. For this purpose, it is useful to identify areas of potential differences significant for people working in diverse teams, to discuss personal or culture-related preferences openly in the team, and to think about the implications that these differences may have on interaction and work processes.

Learning Outcome

To become aware of one's own and the others' preferences
To become aware of implications that individual team members' preferences have on team dynamics
To enhance understanding and cooperation in teams

Competences:

Relationship building
Awareness of the self and the other

Time

45 minutes

Participants

Up to 25

Materials required
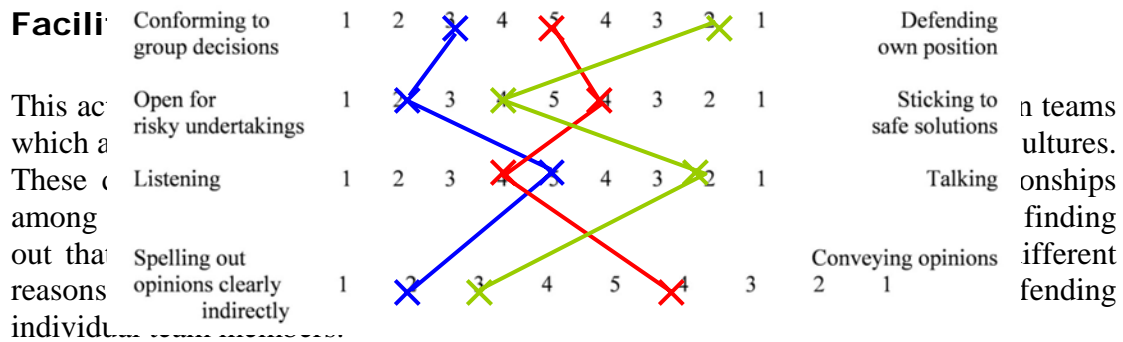
Handout 1
Colour pens
Paper

Procedure

1. Form groups of up to 5

2. Distribute Handout 1 (My preferences + your preferences = conflict?)

3. Introduce the activity to the participants: Each member of the small groups gets a copy of the handout and a different colour pen and is asked to circle the number that corresponds most to their own behaviour. Group members are then required to connect the circled numbers by a vertical line.

   In a second step, all group members share with each other the numbers they have circled and plot them on their own sheets. They then connect the results for each person in a different colour. Each team member should end up with a line diagram in four or five different colours.

4. Ask the team members to select those areas where they find the largest discrepancy and invite them to discuss these specific preferences in the group giving examples of their own interpretation of the items.

5. Team members are then asked to identify possible reasons for the discrepancies. *(Here, participants are likely to attribute behaviour mostly to personality. Some may also point out that their behaviour is in compliance with cultural norms, e.g. preserving harmony, centralized decision making or rule observance.)*

6. It is now necessary to dig more deeply into the "hidden meaning" of the different concepts used in the handout. For instance, in some cultures criticising another opinion may not necessarily be detrimental to group harmony. Also, a person may perceive herself to be fairly quiet, whereas she may come across to someone else as being quite talkative. With regard to long-term or short-term objectives, it is worth discussing what these terms mean to the individual participants.

7. If participants already possess some team experience, encourage them to give examples of situations where their own or others' preferences came out strongly in teams.

Debriefing
(1) To what extent has this activity contributed to a better understanding of the other group (team) members?
(2) Why is it important to discuss such questions at the beginning of a team building process?
(3) Can you think of any problems that might arise if the team consists of people whose preferences diverge significantly?
(4) How would you deal with the differences in a team?
(5) Can you think of ways to manage these differences? Which competencies are required?
(6) How do team members' preferences influence their behaviour in teams?

Facili

Conforming to group decisions	1	2	3	4	5	4	3	2	1	Defending own position
Open for risky undertakings	1	2	3	4	5	4	3	2	1	Sticking to safe solutions
Listening	1	2	3	4	5	4	3	2	1	Talking
Spelling out opinions clearly indirectly	1	2	3	4	5	4	3	2	1	Conveying opinions

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If there is enough time, you can go in greater detail on the individual statements made. Encourage the groups to discuss whether individual preferences might be a result of group member's personality or whether the group members feel that their behaviour would be fairly typical of their respective culture. You can add examples from your own personal experience to illustrate the effects that the differences may have on successful team work. Also make sure that participants understand that the items may also be related in part to personality traits.

In case there is an interest on the part of participants, the discussion could be extended to cultural concepts by Hofstede (1980) (such as power distance, long-term and short-term orientation, individualism vs. collectivism, and uncertainty avoidance) and Hall (1976) (high- and low-context communication, monochronic vs. polychronic).

References

Hofstede, Geert. (1980). Culture's Consequences: International differences in work-related values. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Hall, E. T. (1977). Beyond Culture. Garden City, NY: Anchor Press.

Example
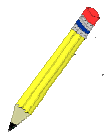
My preferences + your preferences = Conflict?

Instructions:
Use a colour pen to circle the behaviour that corresponds most to the behaviour you would display when working in a team. Number 1 indicates a strong tendency to show a certain behaviour, number 5 indicates that your behaviour would be very much "middle of the road".

Conforming to group decisions	1	2	3	4	5	4	3	2	1	Defending own position
Open for risky undertakings	1	2	3	4	5	4	3	2	1	Sticking to safe solutions
Listening	1	2	3	4	5	4	3	2	1	Talking
Spelling out opinions clearly	1	2	3	4	5	4	3	2	1	Conveying opinions indirectly
Preserving group harmony	1	2	3	4	5	4	3	2	1	Confrontational discussion of conflict
The team leader has decision making power	1	2	3	4	5	4	3	2	1	The team members have decision making power
The team should focus on long-term objectives	1	2	3	4	5	4	3	2	1	The team should focus on short-term objectives
A team should have fixed rules	1	2	3	4	5	4	3	2	1	A team should have no rules
					Flexible Rules					
Team members should handle tasks flexibly	1	2	3	4	5	4	3	2	1	Team members should do one thing at a time
Team members should criticise one another openly	1	2	3	4	5	4	3	2	1	Team members should not offend one another by open criticism