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In the year 2008 a European and an Asian company signed a Joint Venture Contract. Objective: the design, production and marketing of a submarine in Asia. The contract was about training, technical support and supplying of components by the European company. As a first step 30 engineers from Asia were foreseen to take part in technical trainings in Europe. During the second step 90 German and French engineers were foreseen to work as expatriates in Asia for a period of at least one year. The European company had neither experience in such a Joint Venture spanning continents nor in overseas expatriation processes.

The German Human Resources department of the European company asked Holzhauser & Partner (European OD consultants with experience in Asia) for consultancy in expatriate management. Later Holzhauser & Partner was asked by Human Resources (France and Germany) to organise team building and intercultural training for the European engineers. **A team of consultants from Germany, France and Asia developed an integrated approach of “project coaching” including: appropriation of the project by its European members; project management; team building; leadership; intercultural training; negotiation of roles and rules within the European team and with the Asian colleagues; multi-loyalty.** The target groups were: the European engineers, their superiors, the Human Resources and the Joint Venture responsible persons.

A very important focus was the “management of roles and rules” by the future expats, the project steering responsables and the Human Resources department in the European company. **One aim of this article is to draw the attention of persons involved in a global project launch to the importance of an integrated project coaching approach.** And secondly how the promise of this approach can be translated in practice. We try to reveal some key points of the challenge, the possibilities of bringing the project to life and the limits of contracting and executing such an ambitious consultancy project.

Michael Holzhauser / Karin Beckert

Project coaching

Report on an industrial joint venture launch between Germany, France and Korea

This text deals with the consultation of a German-French cooperation and an Asian company. The only “falsification” is the fact that it was concerned not with a submarine (but with another technical apparatus) and not Korea (but another Asian country).

In 2008 a European (predominantly German and French) concern signed a contract with a Korean concern. The aim: the joint development, production and commercial exploitation of a submarine. The first instalment was to be transferred from Asia when the prototype had successfully absolved the first marine tests; the second when the deep dive test had been carried out in the pressure dock and the type approval had been achieved.

As a first step toward the fulfilment of these aims Korean engineers from development and production fields were sent to Europe for training. As second step Europeans from Germany and France travelled to Korea in August 2008 to support the endeavour.

Holzhauser & Partner was approached by the European concern and asked to prepare its European employees for the special requirements involved in cooperation with their Asian colleagues. The request included two modules: Teambuilding and classical intercultural training. Holzhauser & Partner developed an integrated approach to project coaching, which included the following aspects: teambuilding, leadership, project management and role development in the context of European and European-Asian cooperation.

Several specific challenges with which the undertaking and we as consultants were confronted are described here.

1. The beginning and the first hurdles

At the beginning we were informed by the human resources departments in Germany and France that the joint venture was characterised by the technical features of the apparatus: weight, crew, diving depth, BRT, maximum range, consumption etc.

The tasks of the Europeans included, beside the technical consultation, the delivery of components (including black boxes, that is to say components that the Koreans were neither allowed to open nor study in detail) as well as the mediation of experienced subcontractors. The contract was negotiated by the European commercial, supported and formulated by international business lawyers. Organisational development (OD) consultants, cultural experts and managers with experience in joint ventures in Asia were not consulted.

The customer wished that Holzhauser & Partner should begin with an intercultural seminar; as 15 Koreans were due to arrive at the French location. According to the customer 30 French and 5 German technicians and engineers were to be “trained” initially. These Europeans would take over the technical training of the Koreans in Europe. This first phase took place in the French language at the headquarters in France as the 5 Germans had working experience in France. The arrival of the Koreans was delayed again and again as new questions to the contracts at various levels and in various fields arose and had to be dealt with.

In a second phase, which was planned to begin 3 months later, 70 Europeans (predominantly French and German) were chosen to travel to Korea for a year.

We informed the customer (responsibles of the HR department in Germany and France) of our many years of experience in expatriate-management and our own experiences as expatriats in Asia. Both suggested that a stay of 6 to 12 months would be very short for efficiency and social reasons: because a) a lengthier period of acclimatisation for the Europeans was to be expected, b) sufficient experience could not be collected at the location, that would be useful for the professionalism of the technical personal sent and for the European locations after their return. We were answered mainly from the French side: “under no circumstances do we wish that the Europeans settle in and enter into professional and private friendships and partnerships, because one of the greatest dangers is fraternisation, which could lead to the divulgence of technical expertise. The Koreans want to develop, produce and sell a BMW 7 series – we would like them to stay at the level of a 2 CV. At best a Golf class should be the result.”

Such a project was completely new for the European concern both from a technical viewpoint as well as personnel one. Until this date the European concern had only had a few commercials and representatives outside Europe.

We advised the customer (management level of the HR department) that there were various elements in the preparation, both for the European technicians and engineers who would train the Koreans who were to arrive and for the Europeans who were to travel to Korea: consultation of the project leader in project steering; team building among the Europeans who would be recruited from various European sites; cultural cooperation – and that these elements required interlaced treatment.

On the German HR side this was happily accepted the French HR acknowledged it and acquiesced.

The main client based in France normally places “further training” (= “formation“ in French) in modular form and buys expert knowledge. Process accompanying OD is unknown to him. Contract negotiations with process consultants were new for him.

It was unclear for the European concern who should negotiate and close the contract with us, because nobody felt responsible for tenders for this kind of consultation and the whole project fell into spaces between the division of work of our customer: the management side was not yet constructed and in HR there were ongoing decision processes. Also the diffuse threat of the imminent arrival of a large group of engineers from the Korean partner loomed ever closer and Holzhauser & Partner was, due to earlier contracts in international frameworks, attributed with competence for this undertaking. Finally the German HR-side accepted the burden and gave the start signal for the consultation.

We suggested that our customer should inquire of the Korean partner if the Koreans were to receive further training for “cooperation with European partners”. And that it would probably be useful to accompany the development of the non-technical cooperation both in Europe and Korea. We also suggested that managers who had led joint ventures in the Asian country should be included as experts.

2. Integrative approach: Concept and team of consultants

Holzhauser & Partner developed a concept “Accompaniment of a Project Launch Asia-Europe – Project coaching” (see page 16/17).

We formed a team of consultants consisting of Germans, French and Koreans.

The concept envisaged beginning with the manager responsible for the steering of the joint venture: “what are your aims and expectations for the joint venture, concerning prospective personnel and the consultation?”

And later work began with the technical personnel and the project leaders who welcomed the Korean colleagues in Europe in order to develop tasks and roles and “test” them in a secure environment: “what attitude and mindset did they have toward the Korean “colleagues”? Are they colleagues or primarily competitors? What are their roles: technical instructors? Trainer? Experts, who keep their hands in their pockets or take them out and take an active part? Who has which responsibility in the technical development?”

What would be an adequate and appropriate answer to each professional profile of the Korean colleagues?

We looked for a Korean individual who a) knew the producing industry and the leadership in Korea, b) had a divisible understanding of consultation, training and learning, and c) who could develop these questions as a member of an international team of consultants and implement them in practice.

3. The first group: engineers, who welcome and train their Korean partners in Europe

We decided upon a multi-stage procedure: firstly the European technicians and engineers should become acquainted and work out a mutual understanding of aims, tasks and roles – led by a French-German consultant team. Secondly an information phase with training elements pertaining to “the world of work, culture, cooperation with the Korean colleagues” with a Korean trainer, supported by the German-French team of consultants. As a third element “integration”, negotiation of aims, tasks and roles (as proxy for the non-present Korean colleagues) with the Korean trainer.

Everything would be accompanied by meetings with the project leaders from the management of the European concern: “what have we experienced? How are we leading the process and our employees? How well are we working together as a leading team? Where do we need decisions above our level?”

The following difficulties arose:

- Finding a Korean colleague with consultant/trainer-competence; he/she should speak French and/or English. We finally decided upon a successful Korean entrepreneur who owned several trading companies in Europe and had lived in the German-French border area for 10 years. He limited himself to presenting the Korean culture. And later turned of his own accord to the topic that had obviously frustrated him for months, how the national and European bureaucracy hindered him in the development of his companies in Europe. He would not be moved to the introduction of learning processes for the participants – despite previous practice he did not consider himself to be in a position to carry out role-plays with the European technical personnel. This had the advantage that we could subsequently work extensively with the European participants upon: “how can we reach aim definitions, how do we negotiate tasks and roles with a Korean person, who behaves like this?” The participants received an abundance of information about the mindsets and behaviour of Korean engineers and technicians in large-scale industry (based on the background of Korean culture).
- A series of engineers and technicians were named by the European concern, but at the beginning the project leaders were not forthcoming as far as answers to participants questions about the general parameters of their work were concerned. This may also have been due to the fact that they themselves hardly received answers from the level above them, which had the link to the executive board. The contact person for the project leader and the consultants often changed. The French representatives of the French counter industrial espionage were however continuously active and consumed a part of the time for information- and training purposes with the French participants. This led to misunderstandings and irritation among the German engineers who were not included but who had travelled especially to team- and further training at the French location.
- We consultants continuously collected queries that arose among the participants in a theme store: “is the participation in the preparation an indicator for the fact that I will soon be transferred to this project full time? When will my participation in this project begin and when will it end? What portion of my new work in my normal function should I carry out during this time? Can I work in this project “Further training of the Korean colleagues” with the aim of

travelling as of autumn to Korea for a number of years or do these two activities exclude each other?”

- The participants of the consultation wavered between security and insecurity: “our company is a world leader in the field of submarine technology – and I am a professional in this field. Not a lot can happen to me. The Koreans will be able to learn a great deal from me” and: “Yesterday I was told that I must cover a very wide spectrum – partly in specialised fields that I left eight years ago – and that the Koreans had many years of professional experience in a shipyard for commercial ships – will that go well?”. These opposites “dissolved” partially, as we worked through the questions a) the culture shock curve b) the channel of access to colleagues from a foreign country and c) worked intensively on questions of roles (see below).
- The planned arrival of the Korean colleagues was delayed week for week and month for month. Little was known about their professional qualifications. When they came, they were closely led by members of the Korean military, who were sent as administrators – one could ironically say that in this phase the project was effectively led on the European side by the French secret service and on the Korean side the corresponding colleagues.
- A group of 30 Chinese engineers and executives had already been at the French location for a longer period. The French counter industrial espionage insisted that the arriving Koreans should only visit the factory canteen at different times, as a group, accompanied and along a marked corridor – so that they would not see that the Europeans were also dealing with Chinese partners. As a German consultant asked: “how many Asian food stores are there here?” the answer was “one”. The consultant hypothesised that all Asians would meet there anyway.
- The French secret service responsible for the location had ordered that the air conditioning should be dismantled in the working rooms, which were intended for the Koreans. “So that they don’t feel too comfortable here”. Vehement intervention by the future “Chef de Mission“ of the Europeans in Korea was necessary for the replacement of the appliances two weeks after the Koreans arrived, with the reasoning: “what will the Koreans report home about the way in which they were treated here by their European customers? And what consequences would that provoke for us Europeans in a few months in Korea?”

3.1. The programme for this group

The following topics were dealt with during the first two days:

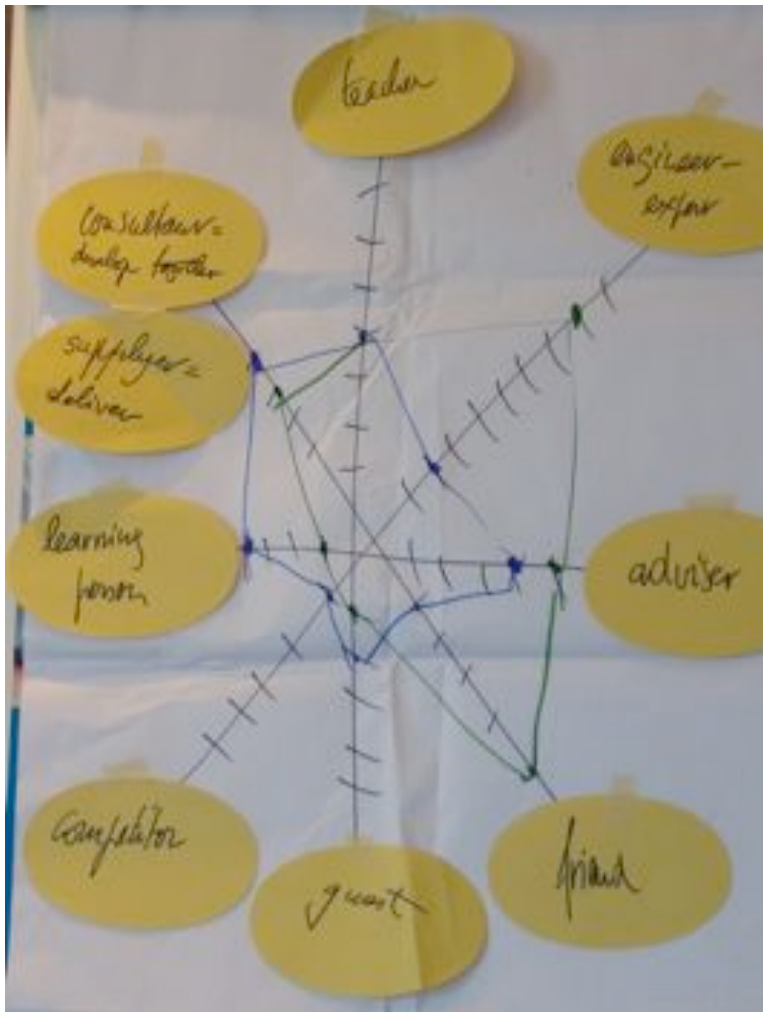
- Framework and challenge of this programme
- Organisation of the project
- Reciprocal expectations, roles, rules of the organisation and the cooperation

Planned for the third day was:

- History of Korea
- Economy and culture in Korea
- Working with Korean partners

For the fourth day:

- In the light of everything that we have heard until now: How should we organise this project? And what is my place in it?



Quelques approches de définitions de différents rôles

- Consultant : explore par questionnements les différents états et éléments d'une situation globale puis donne des éclairages divers sur une situation donnée. Exemple : identifier le pouvoir du demandeur, comprendre les points de vue des acteurs, élaborer différents scénarios d'intervention, déterminer le « rôle professionnel » le plus pertinent au regard de la situation analysée ou perçue, se demander quelle est la méthode la plus adaptée pour résoudre la situation.
- Expert technique : impliqué dans la réalisation de l'action. Rôle très opérationnel : « tu demandes, je te réponds ou je te fais ».
- Professeur : transférer des savoirs. Exemple : donner une conférence, faire un exposé.
- Assistant-soutien-conseil : donner un avis technique (d'expert) accompagné d'un diagnostic et de recommandations. Exemple : donner les opportunités, les limites, les lignes directrices, ainsi que les paramètres à prendre ne compte pour changer ou faire évoluer un système, un savoir faire, une technique.

3.2. Approach and procedure

The consultants had decided to work with visualisation and Metaplan during the whole process. And to ask again and again in individual and group work "What does what you have just heard mean for you? What questions does it prompt? What do you need, from whom, in order to achieve security and clarity in this programme? Where do you stand now? What is on your mind?". This led to great confusion among the French participants at first, because they were used to classical further training with a lot of music from the front and not to being collected by that with which they were confronted. This initial confusion was however soon replaced by relief and enthusiasm: "we are taken seriously here!". The participants who until then only knew almost exclusively technical training, had difficulty changing between levels "the project / my team / my role / me as person" – and this also in an intercultural context. Getting to know each other and teambuilding took up a great deal of space.

Attention was given to the topic: my role with regard to the Korean partner. It proved very productive.

4. The second group: future Expats in Korea

The great majority of the last 37 participants, who were intended to travel to Korea were French, without experience abroad, who had between 5 and 15 years professional experience. The motivations expressed for going abroad varied: to collect new personal experience through work

and/or life in Asia, or to leave the technically very familiar surroundings for a time, to gain new professional experience The question, what each individual originally imagined for himself as dream job caused a lot of laughter, almost everyone wrote “captain” on the card.

The hope that the posting would improve the chances of advancement with the European employer prevailed to a varied degree.

A sub-group was formed by French citizens who had studied at the technical universities in Hamburg-Harburg or FHS Kiel and subsequently entered into employment with German companies. After 5 – 8 years professional experience they were ready to try something new.

On average the French engineers were twelve years younger. On the German side there were no female engineers, on the French side several.

A topic that accompanied both programmes was: how will the Koreans react to many Europeans who according to their age and professional profile did not have a lot of experience or not the type of experience the Koreans expected?

It had not been easy for the European employer to find suitable candidates for all branches in the company. There was unrest in the expat-preparation, as it became increasingly evident that European specialists would have to represent technical fields that lay on the fringe of their professional experience that is to say their occupations during recent years.

The aims of our consultancy were similar to those of the first group: to initially develop understanding among the Europeans for the project, to focus on leadership and cooperation and finally to proceed to the topic: “working together with Korean partners” and to exercise this in advance. Additionally there was the topic “living as an individual/family in a smaller Korean city”.

This time there was a brief introduction by the person with overall responsibility for the programme. He introduced the aims of the cooperation with the Korean partners and emphasised that everyone should work as “pro-active consultants” during their entire time in Korea.

4.1. First part: Team Cohesion around the Korea Program

The aims for the workshop for the 2 days with the Europeans were introduced by the German and the French consultants:

Objectives: get to know each other; understand the goals and management principles of the project; develop roles and rules in the project – based on mutual expectations.

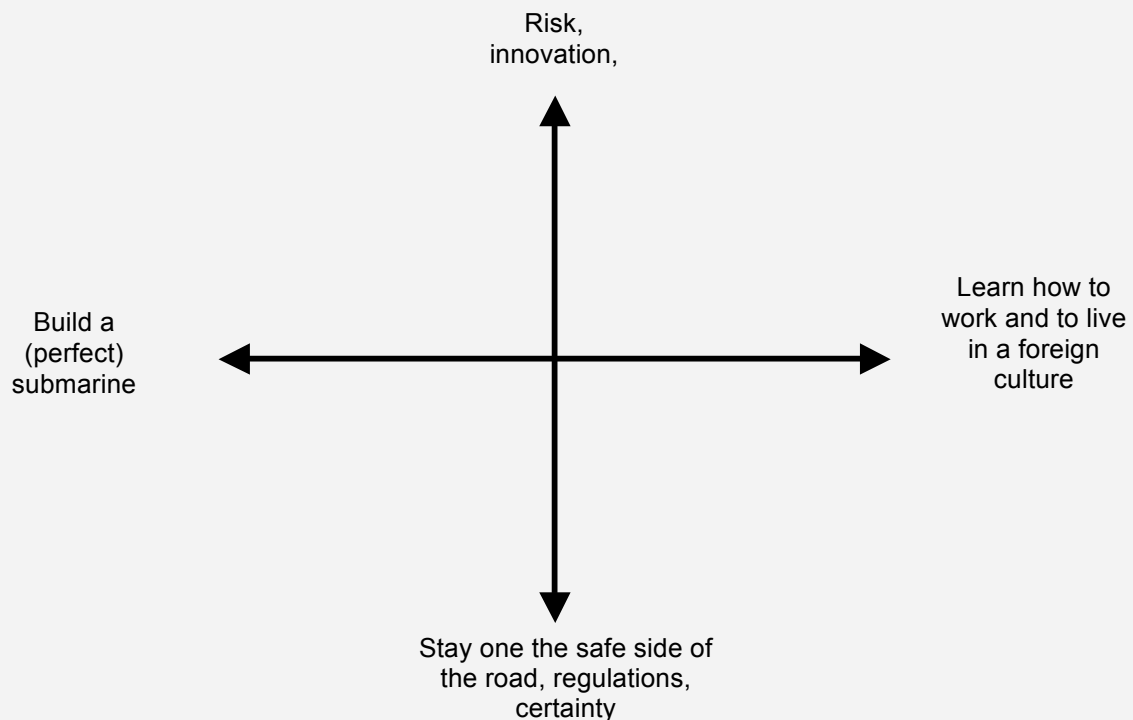
Working methods: not a training; developing together: communication, cooperation, leadership, roles & rules; the consultants know how to support such a process – the project members are responsible for the content and in a large dimension for the success; globish will be our language – not British English; continuous visualization; minutes written by the team members every day to make remembering easier; learning loops; observation and reflection of a new experience.

At the suggestion of the consultants the newly appointed French project leader and his German deputy subsequently introduced the project briefly. Questions of the participants were clustered on Metaplan cards and the project management was given time to prepare answers and subsequently

present them. This led to an unusual dialog for the French participants based upon the questions of the future expats.

A whole series of questions from this topic store, to which the project leader and HR first had to inform themselves, remained open. They could also partially not be resolved during the course of the following days and weeks. This led the engineers forming an increasingly stronger feeling of common bond than the executives who had to work out the technical solutions and guarantee the results to their bosses and the administrators of the concern. All in all it was not always clear for all those involved what they had to put up with as ambiguity, inherent in such a project – and what could have been resolved with a little more competence and commitment. Was the preparation time inasmuch also a training for, “how do I remain capable of action in unclear situations?” – and therewith anticipation of the time in Korea.

A central item of the teambuilding among the Europeans is picked out and illustrated here:



An exercise, which was developed by the consultants and for which a duration of about two hours was scheduled took a lot more time than planned and proved to be an important experience.

The consultants drew a cross in the courtyard of the seminar hotel and asked the participants to position themselves at a point that they felt was appropriate for them. The consultants then asked the occupants of each quadrant “tell us what your place is in this team and why you have taken it?” The answers provoked hefty debates. The next question, “how do you see the occupants of the other quadrants” led to clarifying discussions and explanations.

Several participants expressed the wish to change places and justified this. Some participants suggested adopting a, temporally accentuated perspective: “where will I stand at the beginning of my stay in Korea, where in the middle and where at the end?” This topic was taken up by the consultants in two ways the next day: a) the phases in the framework of expatriation and b) the work for a successful return begins before the journey back.

Further issues were: “can a project with this deployment be successful?” Which deployment should exist and how? And how will attributions and evaluations be perceived and possibly deferred? Who wants to push whom to where, because he/she convinced is that he/she is standing in the “wrong place”?

“How do I accept the motivation expressed by my colleague, why and for how long does he want to go to Korea and what does that mean for our cooperation and life there?”

The processing took place with the whole group (and in the next meeting with the project leaders): “where have the three project leaders positioned themselves? How can this system be led?”

In the course of both next days “meet Korea” this deployment was resumed under the aspect “what do we expect, what deployment do our Korean colleagues expect of us?”

Subsequent to this work unit the topics “roles in the European team, reciprocal expectations, rules, organisation among Europeans, project as learning organisation” were dealt with.

It turned out that the contract with the German and French employers which was intended to be used for all future expats was terminated at departure and that the expats would have to enter into contracts for their stay with a company whose outlines were still being negotiated on location with the Korean side shortly before their departure.

Unrest spread under the French participants as they found out that they would be expected to work considerably longer hours than the French statutory 35 hours per week by both their present employer and the Korean partner. It was also remained unclear what holiday regulations would apply in Korea: according to Korean or German that is to say French industrial law/labour agreement. They were however assured that after a stay of more than 9 months a visit home – also if applicable for family members – would be covered by their present employer.

It was also unclear who would evaluate the performance of the expats during their stay in Korea, the project leadership there or the “old” (and future?) superiors in Europe.

It was already becoming apparent that the kind of professional activity and the general conditions in the foreign culture would be important factors of the residency. This triggered ambivalence among many participants: on the one hand it meant creative leeway and on the other that a lot of energy and time would be necessary to organise work and life – “self management in roles” was called for. Activity not only under unfamiliar Korean rules, but also already in relation to the European company. Amazement and amusement sometimes arose especially then when the project leaders were not present: some of the French engineers lowered their hands and said that they wouldn’t do their work too – the bosses earned disproportionately more and alluded to their much better training and positions. All the while the German engineers rolled up their sleeves and with pleasure and responsibility took over “free” leadership functions above their own positions.

4.2. Second part: “Meet Korea”:

4.2.1. Approach and methodology

The second part was carried out with the same European participants (future expats and project leaders) a European consultant and a Korean female trainer.

The Goals**Provide Orientation:**

What are the relevant differences in thinking and behaving between German, French and Korean business culture?

Enhance Understanding:

Of your own cultural mould and the cultural standards of others.

Improve Effectiveness:

Present yourself in a manner that is positively viewed and helps you to achieve your professional and personal goals.

The Path

*Structure cognitive knowledge in a new manner
Reinterpret existing emotional perceptions
Practice new behavioural approaches*

Result

→ **"Intercultural competence of action"**

The following topics were foreseen:

- The Korean model of the lagging industrialisation
- Mindsets and patterns of behaviour of German, French and Korean engineers, middle managers and executives
- Cultural differences and their effects on the cooperation
- Communication and discussion strategies in Germany, France and Korea
- Personal and professional presentation
- Organisation of meetings including their preparation and retrospect
- Leadership, hierarchy and team
- Decision, planning, organisation, negotiations
- Building appropriate and gratifying professional relationships and networks.
- Living in Korea as single / as European family

After the partially bitter experiences with the Korean entrepreneur as trainer/consultant in the first part of the programme (preparation of the Europeans for the Koreans who will come to Europe for further training), a Korean consultant who knew the business culture of Korea and had experience in coaching and consultancy in cultural contact situations of engineers and managers was searched for.

As orientation the model trainer and co-trainer served that was initially developed in the foreign preparation for managers within the framework of the German Foundation for international development in Bad Honnef and in the last 20 years further elaborated and practiced at the IFIM Institute for intercultural management (Rheinbreitbach). Nobody who fulfilled all these criteria could be found, but a Korean woman trainer who had carried out preparation courses for future expats as well as cultural explanation seminars for employees of German firms who dealt with Korea from Germany was available.

The European consultants introduced the Korean trainer to this working method intensively and showed her how role plays with TV cameras were used in consultation and how the European consultants and the consultants from the destination analysed the dynamics, backgrounds,

assumptions etc. of the dialogues together with the participants. And that the Korean trainer, when she took over the role of a Korean engineer or executive, should enter into the subsequent appraisal with the Europeans, and which effects the chains of stimuli-response had upon the background of culturally influenced attitudes. That it was not only about teaching Korean culture in general, before a historical background, but rather in specific situations that caused the participants problems, that is to say situations that the European consultants knew from experience were difficult for expats. These would be in place as “reading glasses” for the Korean cultural patterns in business situations and could to be utilised as the situation required.

4.2.2. Several central approaches and experiences during “Meet Korea“

Here the role of the expats also stood in the foreground. Topics and experiences from the section “Team Cohesion around Korea Program” were covered.

Special attention was given to the following questions resulting from the dynamics of the workshop:

- How can I attune my expectations of the project and the cooperation with the Korean partner with those of my employer? How can I negotiate roles and tasks in a society where these are mainly regulated from above? This was intensively discussed and exercised in role-plays and inputs.
- Problems and possible solutions to the topic “Time Sheet” were solidified. It had been agreed in the contract between the European and Korean partners that the “Time Sheet” which had been compiled by the expatriats and countersigned by the Korean project leaders would constitute the basis for the settlement between the Korean customer and the European deliverer of services. The foreign experience of the European consultants was helpful here. They constructed a situation in which a European technical leader submitted a weekly plan with fulfilled times to the Korean leadership. The resulting relaxing dialog (role play) was more than enlightening for the European specialists and leadership here an extract:
 - a. “What did you do on Tuesday afternoon?”, “We were at the celebration for the national holiday at the French embassy.” “I will delete this time, it did not serve the project.”
 - b. “What does “meeting” mean”, that you have entered on Wednesday?” “I have met with German and French colleagues here in the planning office and later discussed technical problems per telephone with our European locations”. “If I see that correctly, it was clarification among Europeans – there were evidently no Koreans present – I will delete these times. Why do the Europeans need so much time for internal clarification? I expected experienced specialists who would be clearly led to be sent to us!”
 - c. “Your time stops on Friday morning at 10? Where were you for the rest of Friday and Saturday?” “I already had a lot of overtime stacked up” “I have heard that my Korean colleagues asked many times where the Europeans were during this period – we expect the same involvement of you as your Korean colleagues, they arrange their work and attendance according to our necessities. I must remind you of the fact that we are your customers.”

Many questions become apparent in this example:

- Which roles should/must the European bosses at the location assume?
- Do I have the appropriate competence and the patience to work with Korean partners for a period of several months, who 1) possibly attained a higher diploma than I in the USA, 2) speak an English that I can hardly understand, and how am we doing with my English, 3) are

10 years older or younger than I and 4) have relatively little experience in the technical field that we are concerned with in this project?

- How is the time perspective for the stay of the expats? What makes sense from the point of view of the expats? From the point of view of the European and Korean concerns? How open can I discuss these questions with my colleagues, my superiors? How should I speak about my experiences in Korea with my colleagues / superiors, who have remained in Europe? How do I keep a balance between the collection of experiences in Korea and interest in my return home?
- Questions of loyalty: what is the “correct” closeness and distance to the Korean partners during work and in private life? How will it be addressed if a European colleague or the project leadership have the impression that a project member has overstepped the information limits (everyone agreed that he would not be reported to the French counter espionage, but rather that it should be dealt with among the project members internally)? Thereby the following points were pertinent: a) “co-opetition” between the joint venture and the European company and b) mistake culture and c) identity. To the latter there were many discussions to the topic: How far my identity as engineer and my desire for the best possible perfection can allow me to go – versus the specification book for development and manufacture of the submarine in the joint venture on site? How can I utilise solutions that we have developed for specific configurations in Europe that is to say withhold them depending on the disposition, situation, specification book?

5. Consultation of the project direction

5.1. The three project leaders

The project direction consisted of three persons. A French “Chef de mission” of 42 years of age, who had previously spent a few years working in a Gulf state as representative of the French Ministry of Defence and had been very close to the embassy there. It was advantageous for the project that he was very closely linked with the French state administration and perfectly familiar with their rules of play. But disadvantageous he was not well linked with the German-French concern; this impeded his ability to “expeditiously” bring about a decision in the European company headquarters – especially from Korea.

The vice project leader was a German engineer of 55 years of age who had carried out the German section of the European company’s interim-operations in Japan for a number of years.

The third in the hierarchy was a French engineer, who had had a contract with the German employer for many years and had worked predominantly at German locations for 15 years and was married to a Korean woman. It was intended that he should take over the building of the production after ca. 1 ½ years that is to say advise the Koreans in the construction of the production.

During the preparation phase a Korean was employed who had grown up in Europe and had never lived in Korea. His assignment would be described as “Finances and Human Resources” – it had been noticed in the meantime that these functions had not been provided for among the Europeans. He was directly attached to the French and German project leaders. He had already found it difficult to find his way into his role during the preparation in Europe and was out of his depth with “finances and human resources”. During the intercultural part of the consultation he often changed his position. Later in Korea it was not possible for him to find his place between the cultures, demands and attributions.

5.2. Further protagonists in the project direction

At the French headquarters where all meetings also took place there were further intervening protagonists: for one the managing director of the overall concern named a person who should directly supervise the project for him. He only appeared before the participants once. Otherwise the communication took place over the French project leader.

Further intervening persons were between 5 and 8 persons of the human resources from the French location. They endeavoured to find answers to the many unsolved questions pertaining to leaving the country, the contract, personnel politics, which the participants (including the project leaders) posed. This often took place in coordination with the German HR staff at the German location.

5.3. Consultation of the three project leaders

These had on the one hand predominantly roles as participants in the section “Meet Korea”, and on the other the participants and consultants addressed them as direction level in the plenary session, and group meetings of the workshops and also in teambuilding.

They were also partially learners and partially protagonists with a specific position – e.g. when questions such as “What role do I have in this project? How can this question be clarified with the Korean side?”

The consultants discussed programme, approach, methodology and expectations of interventions and roles of the project leaders with the three project leaders before each workshop. After each work day with the team there was a round with the project leaders: “How did we experience today? What is pending? What thoughts are you considering in your role as project leaders?”

It was also foreseeable that there would be specific challenges for the project leaders on location: a multi-loyalty between the European engineers, the headquarters in Europe and the diverse Korean partners.

Further we would like to emphasise:

- The three project leaders had accepted an exciting and challenging function by taking over this task – but they were also standing in the eye of the storm. There were hardly any points of reference for the work that they had begun in their companies and their previous experience.
- The framework had been determined by the concern management, the commercials, and the corporate lawyers etc. and the finalization was announced before the press as a success. The implementation on the technical level was then left to “the engineers” although the contract provided for a house where the cellar was placed above the roof. And the human resources were supposed to supply and train the appropriate personnel. This is where a classical cultural difference takes place: the Asian and the French version entails accepting this „challenge“, adopting the ambitious aims and rolling up their sleeves in order to make the impossible possible, “impossible n’est pas français!” (and also not Korean). German engineers require an intermediate phase, in which “the bosses” first clearly expound how impossible these conditions are under protest. Only then do they sit at their computers at night with sly smiles and work hard: “we’ll show the guys at the top who don’t understand a thing”. It makes no sense for French engineers to protest – one only makes oneself unpopular with “la hiérarchie” and gets one’s knuckles rapped on occasion. This is why French engineers would rather try to quietly and creatively play off their superiors.

- The role understanding of the French project leader consisted of (as usual in France in the state-related industry) at the beginning, seeing himself mainly as a transmission belt for the decisions that had been made above him. He considered it normal that he received no answer from above to questions that he or the project colleagues asked: it is not the job of the boss to know and answer all the answers of the engineers under him. One is the boss because one has better training, the overview and a higher understanding. Abroad he saw himself as representative of the French state and its interests.
- The role understanding of the German vice-project leader at the beginning consisted of protecting “his” team members in the project from the subject specific nonsense (“we know and experience every day anew, that the bosses have neither an inkling of technical questions nor personnel leadership”) and the impermissible infringements from above. He saw himself as an advocate of the best possible realistic solutions as determined by the technology and as “older brother” of the team members. Moreover he was the only one with experience in engineering and manufacturing in Asia.
- The third in the hierarchy of the project leadership had a lot of knowledge and experience in dealing with the German, French and Korean culture – and obviously critically reflected upon this. This is why he restrained himself when “nonsense“ was being spoken – he didn’t want to play the cultural teacher and – mediator. Sometimes however it burst out of him when, “obviously unobjective, dubious and personal and nationally discriminating” comments were made. It was clear to all of the others that he, due to his domestic situation, saw his professional future as expat of a European company in Korea – whereas the other members of the project leadership were looking at a job over a period of 2-3 years in Korea.
- The project leadership had strongly differing conceptions regarding a possible consultation of the project leadership by the German-French-Korean team of consultants: the French project leader vacillated between two poles: “they are subcontractors and we have ordered something from them” and “they have quite a lot of experience and knowledge that can also be useful for me, and they are educationally unaccustomed but successful”. The German vice-project leader had high expectations on the consultation, particularly because the German leader of the team of consultants had worked in Asia, had been an expat and was obviously in a position, to understand the French pattern of action and its backgrounds. The participant-activating work method appealed to him.

The project leaders increasingly grew into their supervisory roles. Our consultation supported them in becoming conscious of their (culturally oriented) understanding of the project, tasks, team and leadership and to attune them. The reciprocal expectations, the understanding of leadership and – practice in the contact with their entrusted engineer colleagues developed increasingly so that they were seen more and more as competent and legitimate superiors by the engineers of the respective cultures. That which already applies for many in middle management in a national context – having to work in a sandwich-position – is in such a construct even more complex.

6. The team of consultants

- For us as process consultants the focus lay upon the accompaniment of the leadership level and the linking of the various interventions. For the leadership and the principle customer the focus (initially) lay upon further training and consultation for the level engineers. There was a permanent struggle because the supervision level was concerned with questions of the leadership of the project and negotiation of the roles in their team. There was not a model for such processual methods by consultants in this company. The French consultants were more open to sequential training units than the German consultants who came from traditional OD.

- As mentioned above the contract between Europe and Korea was formed with technical competence for submarines and under extensive consultation by lawyers and financial experts. Organisational consultants or persons with experience in the companies of the destination country were not consulted. The difficulty for the leadership and the engineers of the joint venture in the implementation lay in the definition of tasks and roles that would give them a chance of success within this predefined framework. The overlooked pitfalls and hurdles in the cooperation a) inside the European specialist and management personnel and b) between Europe-Korea became obvious in the course of the coaching and team accompaniment. The handling of conflicts with Asian customers and colleagues by German and French project leaders was quite differently experienced and estimated on the meta-level. This also played an important role among the consultants, because they mirrored the countries of the clients.
- The consultants supported the European engineers in developing their tasks and roles and “trying them out” in a protected environment: what approach and mindset is for example adequate toward Korean “colleagues” (are they colleagues, competitors?)....
- What unclear tasks and roles did the client push over to us consultants – and we accepted them to some extent willingly? Cue: if the consultant can no longer put up with lack of clarity, he plays the “ersatz manager”, at least “knowledgeable”. This also provoked varying role models and intervention patterns among the German, French and Korean consultants.
- We invested a lot of time and energy in the development of a common understanding of the assignment, the aims, the work methods and the cooperation within the international team of consultants (D-F-K). It took several months - always parallel to the work with the client. A small example: the Korean colleagues were sometimes embarrassed by the way in which the European colleagues “confronted”; sometimes the European colleagues had difficulty putting up with the way in which the Korean colleagues slipped out of the coaching role into the mere “Korean information mode”. It was also obvious with the French colleagues that quite different points were in the foreground of the professional self-understanding and practice: “Role” does not belong to this. French consultants respect demands from the concern hierarchy and like to deal with topics methodically as they learnt from their teachers in their training. On the other hand, French consultants are more familiar with working in implicit contract situations. The German consultants fight for explicitness.
- Our work took place on behalf of a periodically only very diffusely present client. We were able to reach clearer contracts with the project participants and the direct project leaders than with the concern as client. Whereby the topic “consultant or supplier” had to be discussed at times and sometimes developed in the light of national lines.
- The participants experienced the team of consultants as very useful. The cooperation – after initial irritations because the methodology was unfamiliar to the French – was experienced by both sides as very constructive and productive.
- The phenomenon of power and powerlessness within our international client system sometimes spilled over to the consultant team. What had to be processed as mirror phenomenon?

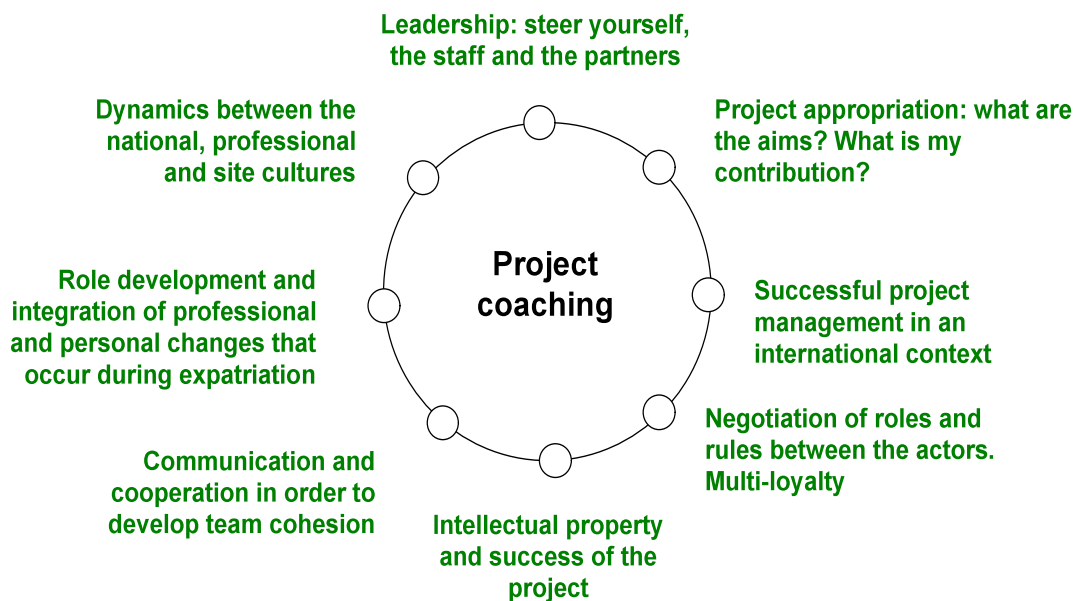
7. Project coaching

Holzhauser & Partner further developed the integrated consultancy approach for such situations from the practical experience gathered and the reflection up to this point.

Project coaching - An integrated approach instead of working in small corners

The project coaches contribute their experience so that an integrated approach, over and above the functional-technical challenges, to the following topics is effective during the course of the project.

Accompaniment of a Project Launch Asia-Europe



These issues are interrelated and have to be treated linked to the project/company architecture and not as isolated „short training actions“.

The consultants bring in their experience in a way that the project becomes more than a coexistence of single technical challenges: integration can be more and more effective.

Description of the project coaching

The result: the chances of success for the project and its participants increase drastically:

- There is an integrated approach of project architecture, technical and management design – and practice.
- Risks appear earlier and the leaders can concentrate on essential issues.
- Members develop a shared vision of the primary task of the project.
- Members set and meet mutual expectations and contributions to success.
- Members develop an appreciation of cultural standards that enables them to:
 - correctly interpret and anticipate the approaches of each cooperation partner
 - recognise areas of conflict and constructively handle them
 - accept different forms of motivation and commitment
 - exercise power in the complex hierarchy of the project.
- All the project members feel much more comfortable with their challenges on the level of profession, role and person.

- *The chance to fulfil new challenges grows for everybody. Why should they repeat all the mistakes of their predecessors in other projects?*
- *Transparency and mutual understanding become a daily principle.*
- *The project is seen by everybody as an opportunity for professional and personal learning.*
- *There are more candidates for the jobs in the project: the chance to recruit the best increases.*

Steps and Addressees-Groups of the project coaching

In the first phase:

- *The Project Leaders in charge of the Launch: on the basis of the Management System and their experience they will develop a specific answer to their new challenges. They need to think and act for example in a triangle of Korean, German and French communication, leadership, decision processes. We propose continuous accompaniment for the team composed of the project leader and managers of Operations, Quality, Finance, Human Resources, Technical Support - and their deputies.*
- *The Human Resources in Europe: on the basis of the targets of the project launch they have to steer the national and international mobility within the framework of personnel development.*

In the second phase:

- *Accompaniment of the mixed teams in Europe and overseas on different levels and interfaces: project leaders, technical responsables, white and blue collars*
- *Support to the project management to reflect the experience (the project as a learning organisation)*
- *Individual coaching and if necessary specific support in crisis situations*
- *Continuous loops for the leaders and employees that join after the project launch.*

How learning from experience and guided exchange leads to success and the contribution of project coaches

Becoming an international leader or manager is largely a process of learning from experience. We focus primarily on individual and group experience and expectations. To work better in an international project does not mean the accumulation of new knowledge but rather a transformation of the identity, role, attitudes and way of acting. At the beginning there can be some training and transfer of knowledge to the project members, but it is most important to support the various levels in an international project in their exchange. Learning loops for all project members for example "peer learning groups" are offered. The primary job of the consultants is to support the leaders in their organisation of the learning processes along the different phases. The consultants help the leaders to focus on the management of tasks and of the relationships in the project.

Practical alternatives based upon the consultant's experience with similar situations may serve as useful references. Information about different business cultures will be provided. Input to topics that arise can be provided by the consultants.

Project coaching has many advantages ...

- *The consultants help the senior executive to keep an eye on the overall steering of the project. They accompany as partners; they give food for thought and security.*
- *Project coaches know the pressure that those responsible are subject to and which often leads them assert themselves with the sentence, "I have everything under control". Project coaches generate protected room for honest reflection, in which uncertainty and doubts can be dealt with.*
- *The aim is not to lose sight of basic essentials in the great number of pressing, urgent questions and decisions.*

8. The expats in Korea

The departure of the European expats was technically well organised. A number of participants “reported” to us consultants during the first 18 months about their experiences in Korea. Several representative for others:

- “Getting closer in the cooperation with our direct Korean colleagues is very different in comparison to Europe. At the beginning they were – at least when others were present – extremely reserved and exaggeratedly self-assured. That has however changed in the meantime: we work together very trustingly and combine our technical knowledge and experience solution oriented. This work is enjoyable and successful.”
- “Many of us believed then that the consultant team were exaggerating the difficulties of the organisation of the cooperation in the role plays. Here in Korea we realised that it is even more complicated than they described. That is sometimes very stressful.”
- “The collaboration between German, French and Korean colleagues at the engineer and technician level is very good – it becomes difficult as soon as a Korean manager is involved. Then there is often a struggle to show him that we are not his subordinates whom he can order about in a military fashion.”
- “It is difficult for families with children here, mainly because nobody speaks English. The European families spend a great deal of time together. The singles play a lot of sports and make short trips for several days – also to the neighbouring countries.”
- “Most here have understood that they will have to arrange their own return home: they try, as you have advised, to keep in contact at various levels with their colleagues and superiors in Europe. We no longer exist for our head office – except when we have successes to report.”
- “The project supervisors in the French headquarter leave us here in the rain and are hardly aware of their framework setting and supervisory responsibilities. They want to keep out of things. Sometimes we engineers must escalate conflicts, which lie in the construction of the joint venture and require decisions and interventions by the responsables in Europe upward.” “The superiors feign deafness and only answer indirectly: They are probably incapable of solving that on site. There will be repercussions for them.” “The joint venture responsables who are close to the executive board, only flew to Korea once and that very late and their stay was short and only happened after massive threats from us. And we did not find his reaction helpful here, because he made almost all of the mistakes that one should avoid in negotiations with Korean partners one after the other.”
- “What many of us here miss is uncomplicated technical communication. As discussed in the preparation I must work in a far wider technical spectrum here than I did in Europe – unfortunately I cannot go into the next hall and consult a colleague. The colleague is namely still in his hall in Europe. And so we have to telephone and mail a lot – and that is subject to many restrictions.”
- “We German technicians and engineers have far more difficulties with the French leadership than with our Korean colleagues.”
- “The German colleagues sometimes get lost in technical details, all in all the German side avoids strategic questions. The German bosses only want to enter into debates with the Koreans if the have previously safeguarded everything.”

A lot of news from Korea corresponds with classical German-French patterns. An example: if there are conflicts on the management level, the German conviction is: “the better idea will prevail (quasi by itself)”. For this reason the Germans in the leadership level avoid discussion with foreign partners who

are perceived as powerful and strategically functioning. If the “better” technology and the experienced management does not assert itself, the Germans go readily to the second row and take over implementation tasks (“we can prove it to them there”). This behaviour of the German leadership is very unpleasant for German (and French) specialist and management personnel in the following levels of the pyramid: They do not experience their German leadership as supportive. And so the withdrawal finally pervades (where it was perhaps still a conscious decision at the top of the pyramid) further downwards and strategic decisions are influenced less and less by the German side.

A number of project engineers would have liked to stay longer, for professional reasons and out of cultural interest. As reason for not extending their stay they stated that a) the as inadequate experienced support of the superiors b) that they were quickly cut off from the professional development opportunities in Europe and c) that hardly anybody in Europe appreciated the very difficult technical challenges they had mastered in Korea.

The experience, the feeling of wellbeing, the phases in Korea in professional and personal life are influenced by – as we know – many factors. It would have been worthwhile accompanying the expats and investigating their perspectives (and those of the Korean side) and using the results for the expats themselves and for “similar” constellations.

9. Continuation of the consultation?

It was agreed between the client and Holzhauser & Partner during the consultation of the first two groups that three steps should follow:

- Team building and preparation of the second group of expats who were to depart 4-6 months after the first group.
- Consultation of the on site project leaders for the steering of the project and for the cooperation with the Korean leaders.
- Accompaniment of the collaboration between the technical personnel who were sent and the Korean colleagues. The European project leadership wished to endeavour to reach a common mandate for the consultants with the Korean side.

The first planned consulting appointment in Korea (continuation teambuilding and consultation of the project leaders – and this all in a cultural context) was cancelled only a few days before the planned departure of the consultants.

Afterwards there were several months of back and forth between the consultants and the HR in France, who were in the meantime responsible for the consultation (actually in their view now only training modules) – the responsables on the German HR side were excluded. The consultants suggested as a first and integrative step interviews with the expats in Korea, to give these the opportunity to describe their situation and to allow these experiences to flow into the next step. This was rejected as was the suggestion that they should speak with the Korean project leaders and their Korean Counterparts. The HR on the other hand only wanted to send a single consultant to Korea with the task of conducting a once-only three day further training with a lot of input and emphasis on intercultural training for the 15 European project members, who in the meantime had travelled to Korea as second wave.

These negotiations fell in a wave of general and particularly rigid planned financial cuts in the concern.

In the first weeks and months there were a lot of messages to the French headquarters from the expats about difficulties in Korea, so that the members of HR in particular were heavily stressed and had reached their limits. Conversations with the consultants shifted to the fringe.

The interest and the status of the “Korea project” were subject to big fluctuations in the German French enterprise. Added to this was the lack of experience with expat support and process consultation. Many start-up expenses had not been included in the budget due to the fact that this was the first joint venture enterprise Europe-Asia for this concern, including the time-budget, which would demand remote support from the headquarters. Almost nothing had been planned for organisation consultation, teambuilding, coaching and cultural information. Additionally during the construction of the European team it emerged that a lot of money would be required for technical further training – and so the general further training allocation was used for this purpose.

The perspectives “what is?” and “what will follow?” and “how can the client and consultant system function together reasonably?”, varied so much that a continuation of the assignment was no longer possible.

We heard months later that a trainer from Paris had gone to Korea to hold a three-day “intercultural information event” – with “brilliant” transparencies – but without speaking with the expats or the Korean side either before or afterwards. This seemed to be the minimum intervention to which the European client was able to agree to within its internal processes and disputes.

10. Critical appraisal from the viewpoint of the consultants

The persons with whom we worked considered our approach to be worthwhile and successful: an “integrated project coaching” that addressed the various protagonists (engineers, project leaders, HR, project supervision in the European headquarter) instead of holding isolated training days.

We further developed the part teambuilding, leadership, project management and role development (aimed at the European workers) in the following consultancy mandates and applied them – tailored of course to the respective context.

The part Meet Korea (or Malaysia or India....) is very dependant on the consultant from the individual cultural context. Working with an approach “contrast culture” and a co-trainer from the destination country requires careful coordination with the Korean consultant/co-trainer. If one wishes to work on role expectations on the Korean side and complementary roles (and their negotiation) between European engineers and their Korean “colleagues” it is necessary that the Korean consultants are familiar with recent developments in Korean industry and can depict them and implement them in coaching sequences.

The third part “Integration” (after the project appropriation among Europeans and the business culture - training), worked on aspects such as: “if I now know all this and have tried it out – what will my on site role be realistically speaking? With whom must I negotiate this role and how?...”. This integration work was of great benefit for the participants and the clients system.

The understanding of what consultancy is, varied greatly according to the nationality (German, French, Korean) – also between the client and the consultants. These differences could only be partially “dealt with and resolved”.

Which warning signals did the consultant team overlook? Or: if one enters into such a scenario as consultant, must one be prepared for the fact that everything will neither pan out according to the rules *lege artis* – nor the professional OD?

Questions pertaining to the contracts were not the defining element, but needed to be clarified now and again throughout the process:

- The responsibility for agreements and contracts changed by the client often. This meant for us that we sometimes “mistakenly” thought that something had been contracted, which was in question again two days later.
- The contract had been mainly settled with the German HR-side at the beginning, but was increasingly determined by the French HR-side, who acted independently in the first phase, but then increasingly received very narrowly composed guidelines from the French project supervision at executive level.
- What can be done as a consultant system when one is called into a project at a point where the project responsables have not yet been decided upon? Trust that the changing responsables will later honour that which someone else has agreed upon with a third party?
- On the side of the client the tendency: “we are looking for an intercultural trainer/Korea for our engineers who will travel abroad”, on the consultants system side: “You have told us that this is the first situation in which your engineers will go to a European-Asian joint venture and this in large numbers. We can consult you on how expat management can take place under these conditions. For example how this system of German and French engineers can be led, – also in an Asian context”. Did the client and the contractor meet each other half way during this struggle?
- We have suggested that we analyse the experiences, which were made during the “measure” with the clients system. And to consider together what these experiences mean for project conception, -implementation, personnel selection, expatriate-management, standard-advanced training, to leadership in the company, etc. now and later.

The feedback of the participants and a number of responsables in the project leadership – also in the course of the stay in Korea suggest that many consultancy sequences and the integrated model were useful, for the European team as well as for the collaboration with the Korean partners.

It was advantageous for those involved that, conceptual and personnel teambuilding, consultation of the project leadership, intercultural training were thematically interwoven and these with a common thread such as “project understanding, role negotiation, agreement on rules, orientation in new surroundings, management in uncertain context...”.

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