Chapter Four

Implementing Best Practices*

The previous chapters have shown that the dynamics of *all* teams will be affected by the personalities, expertise, status, motivation and attitudes of the individuals involved, as well as by team and organisational characteristics and the nature and structure of the task. On top of this, we have established that due to individual cultural differences and differences in the national representation, linguistic fluency and preconceived ideas within the team, international teams are likely to have greater communication difficulties than national teams. This chapter describes the actions that team leaders and members can take to enhance their performance and ensure that likely pitfalls are avoided.

The model used is based on four simple phases in a team's life cycle; the fact that all teams form and then have a beginning, middle and end. However, many teams roll on for long periods of time with changing membership and focus and no clear beginnings and ends. Team leaders and members in these on-going teams need to take an interim point, such as setting a new work plan, celebrating an interim result, reviewing the vision and goals, or introducing a new team member to set the point at which the model would come into play. They will see that the useful things they can do are the same.

As mentioned in Chapter One, international teams are likely to be made up of technical and professional experts who are working with knowledge rather than physical labour. In order to achieve flexibility and responsiveness, many shop-floor teams have learnt each other's jobs through multiskilling, where they transfer technical skills to each other. Because of the heightened emphasis on good process, international team leaders and members also need to be multiskilled at handling intercultural interaction all through the team's life cycle. Team leaders and members need to actively sculpt the interaction in the team to best fit the different stages of the task. Unless the team has a clear model of how to do this, words like 'team processes' usually either get a yawn or a big cheeky grin. This chapter will work through the model from the point of view of an international team leader, but we are convinced that the whole team needs to take responsibility for implementing these best practices.

*Thanks go to McGraw-Hill and M. Berger for permission to reproduce and adapt this chapter from M. Berger (Ed) (1996), *Cross Cultural Teambuilding*, McGraw-Hill, UK.

The Underlying Framework of the Model

Whatever the composition and geography of the team and whatever their task, there is a time before teams interact: phase one. There is a time when the whole team first meets: phase two. There is a period of continuing to work together to get the task done: phase three and a period of completing the task and hopefully passing on the learning: phase four. Team sponsors, leaders, members and facilitators have found this four stage model easy to work with and to develop for themselves. While this model was developing within Wellcome, it transpired that almost exactly the same model with similar wording, but interesting differences, was developed in the human resource department of another large UK pharmaceutical company. This discovery was reassuring that somewhere we must both be stating the obvious, which is usually what works. Figure 4.1 describes the basic model. The model shows how the eight factors, identified in Chapter Two, need to be managed throughout the whole four phase life cycle. There is a lot of emphasis on the work that needs to be done before a team ever meets.

This model is cumulative. That is, the better the eight factors are managed at each phase, the more productive and less troublesome the next phase will be.

Similarly, the more mistakes that are made in each phase, the more likely your team is to fall apart. So the earlier these factors are identified, acknowledged and accounted for, the easier the teamwork will be. This is why Karen has coined the phrase, 3 × 1 preparation for international teams. If it takes you one month to set up a national team, give yourselves three months to set up an international team. Another way of looking at this guideline is, if the team meeting is going to last one day, you need to do three days preparation; for a three-day meeting, allocate nine days of preparation time, probably starting two or three months in advance etc.

Phase one: Start up, Pre meeting

This phase can be summed up as: 'know your task and team'. Wellcome discovered that only 3 out of 42 of its newly established international project teams knew who their project sponsors were. Most of them only had a vague idea of the main purpose of their teams and were left guessing as to the real reason they had been established. They surmised that the point must be to reduce duplication and increase global efficiency, but very few of them thought that these activities were directly linked to the companies overall global strategy. So the first useful step that team sponsors, leaders and relevant managers who will be designing the actual project team can take is to:

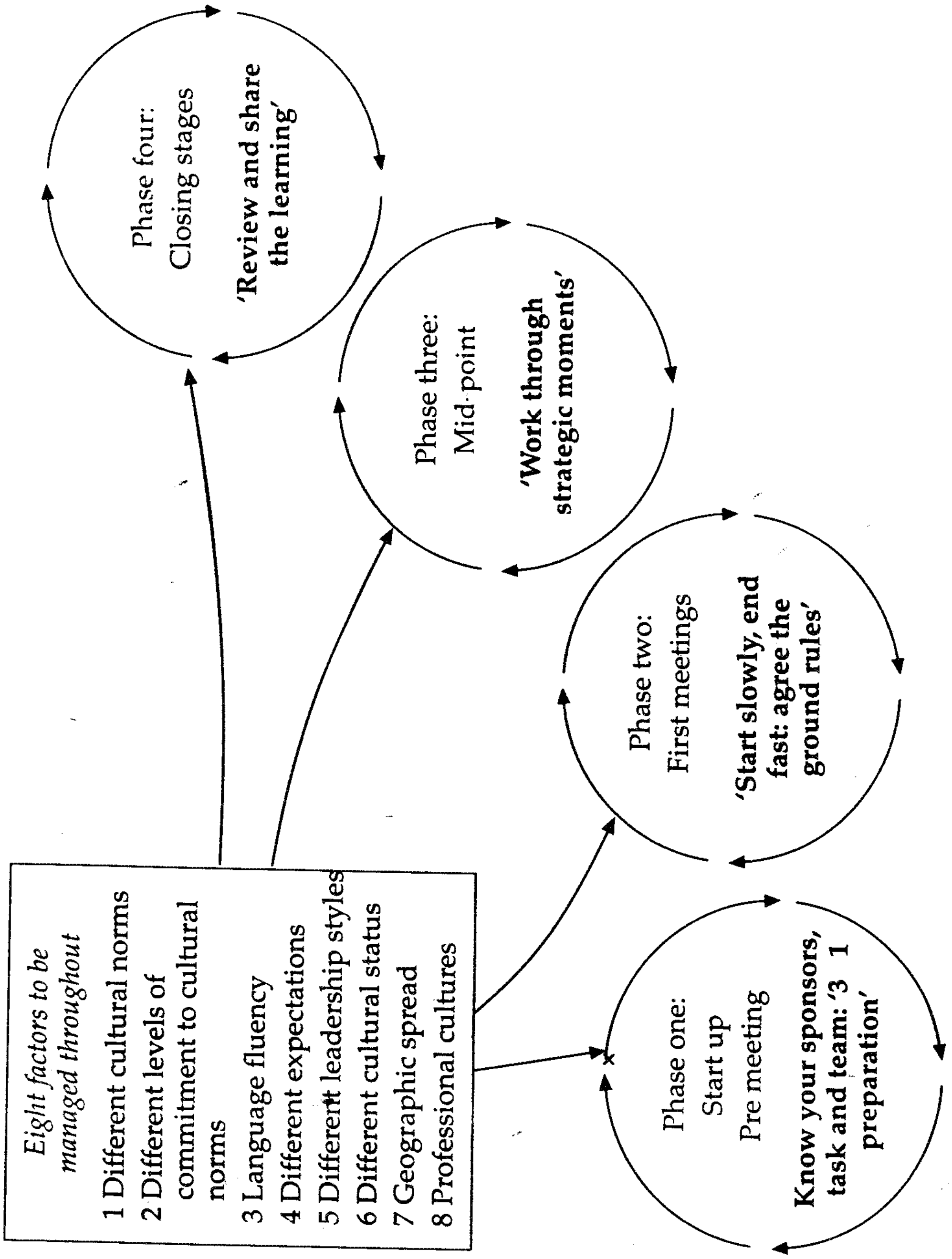

Figure 4.1: An international team's life cycle

1 Develop and agree the purpose of the team with the sponsors

This happens best in one, or a series of, face to face meeting(s), but can be done in a series of teleconferences, e-mails or in a groupware discussion if necessary.

The team leader and sponsor(s) need to painstakingly clarify the mission, purpose, agenda, accountability, time frame, resources available, organisational barriers and key stakeholders.

The team sponsors should lead the session and make sure that all the relevant people are there. Who should constitute this 'project design' team will depend on the context of the team. Suppose a new cross regional team is being set up in a company that has otherwise worked very independently. The relevant country/line managers need to attend some part of or set of these meetings as they are the ones who will need to work out their new relationship to the team members, change the support systems and agree cross-regional budgeting.

2 Select the team members

Once the purpose of the team has been clarified, the next step is to establish the team membership. Quite a lot has been written showing how the purpose of the team will determine the type of staffing, the skills needed and the internal and external team boundaries[1]

The process by which the team members are selected will also have a powerful influence on the subsequent dynamics of the team.

Structured selection processes can overcome organisational biases such as dominant cultures and gender biases. One company found that while introducing global behavioural criteria for internal jobs was fraught with cross-cultural problems, they at least stopped appointing the same sort of person as the person who had just left.

There is also the problem of who should have the main say in selecting team members. This is not the role of the team sponsor. Team leaders often only know who is, or has been, good on someone else's team. Line managers may not want to lose their best people on long-term secondments* or to manage the consequences of overloading their best people on part-time assignments. They will want to create opportunities for training up and coming departmental or regional staff, while the team leaders want experienced people who are already very competent and available. These different perspectives need to be sorted out.

* Especially if they are in charge of a profit centre and paid according to their centre's financial performance.

Especially when different regions are being integrated, specific team roles may have very different levels of experience and standing in the different regions. In Wellcome, the very experienced UK project managers were the project leaders and had a full co-ordinating, negotiating, reporting and advocacy role in the team. In America, project managers were junior staff drawing up schedules and work plans while the project leaders represented and co-ordinated the team. When integrated American/UK teams were created, they were based on the American project model. A whole group of UK professional staff were disenfranchised. When an American project leader was lucky enough to get one of the original UK project managers on his/her team, he/she had little idea of how to use their skills.

So the project design team needs to take responsibility for the full impact of what they are proposing and all the vested interests in choosing who should be on the teams. Senior directors and managers are usually wooed by the strategic advantages that they see coming their way and reckon that the staff will work out how to make it happen. As a result, many companies are making it up as they go along and this can be very hard on international team leaders. Team leaders are advised to work out a clear contract of the goal and boundaries of the work with the sponsors.

Throughout this setting up process, the team leader will be gaining insights into the areas of similarity and difference between the team members and the tensions or points of cohesion that are likely to occur. For instance, if a young team leader has been selected on the basis of having broad project skills, older expert technicians may feel resentful. This insider knowledge is vital. Without it, the team leader cannot start to consider how to make these issues conscious within the team in phase two, nor manage any residual fallout in phase three.

3 Plan the communication technology support

Once the geographical location of the team members is established, the project design team needs to assess what communication technology can enhance the interaction of the team for that particular task. An expert from the information technology or services department usually needs to be involved at this project design phase, especially if international teams are a new phenomena. This is not necessarily the time to design the technology, only to appraise what means of communication currently exist within the company, what is available on the market, what the team can benefit from, how much it would cost, how long it would take to introduce/train the team members and how much budget is realistically available.

As someone once said, 'when you have settled your budget for setting up an international team, double it'.[2]

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4 Decide if you need an external facilitator, contract with the sponsors and team and clarify the boundaries of responsibility and the facilitator's role

This is an opportunity to decide what level of facilitation skills is needed for that particular team and whether to use external or internal help. The key issues to consider when making these decisions are:

a Are the team members coming with conflicting agendas where a neutral person would aid common agreement?
b Does the team leader need to be heavily involved in the technical detail of the task. Will this make it hard to also attend to process?
c What is the level of experience and confidence of the team leader in managing an international team with the particular mix of nationalities and histories involved?

In our view, a facilitator's work is *not* to get teams out of trouble. It is to teach teams how to manage themselves from the start so that they can progressively improve their processes and creatively manage differences and stalemates when they arise. There is a caveat to this which is to do with the readiness and openness of the organisation and teams.

We have found that if facilitation and managing the processes of international teams is very new to the organisation, there can be a strong sense of resistance. 'We want to have a go at this first without 'outside' interference.' In this case, it is better to let the team start up in its own way, discover the difficulties and come in about three to six months later. After seeing the benefits, most team members and leaders will invite the facilitator in at the beginning of the next team cycle. On the other hand, if the organisation already has a strong ethic of training and teamwork, often you can go in at the beginning without any difficulty.

Expense should not be a consideration in deciding whether to have a facilitator or not. Good facilitators will pay for themselves many times over if the team would otherwise have difficulties. Many international teams have rejected a facilitator only to have to start again when they have reached a stalemate. This invariably costs the team and the organisation far more than if a facilitator had been involved all along. There is no fixed role for a facilitator and the most effective role will depend on the needs of the team. Criteria to help you consider how to use a facilitator effectively are covered in the next chapter.

It is the authors' conviction through experience that at least 50 per cent of a good facilitator's effectiveness depends on clearly defining the role that the facilitator will play, prior to the teamwork.

Some companies suggest that facilitators should only participate if the team asks for help. This does not work. If the facilitator has had no mandate to guide the team and is then expected to come in when the team hits trouble, it is the facilitator, not the team leader, who gets blamed for the half-baked outcome. 'You know, we do not understand what difference you made', a facilitator can hardly turn around at this point and say, 'but you did not let me make a difference'.

5 Interview the key players

Once the membership has been agreed with the team members, it is useful for the team leader to start getting them involved, prior to meeting face to face. This can be done through interviews or sending out a questionnaire to find out how much the team members already understand about the task, their attitude towards, or historical interaction with, each other and their level of commitment. Some leaders and facilitators find it useful to ask would-be team members to fill in personality tests or team role questionnaires and to process these before the team first meets.

Simplicity and cultural relevance is the key to international teams employing the results as a feedback tool to improve their own performance.

This kind of work is especially useful in organisations where there are high levels of cynicism or uncertainty due to retrenchment exercises or bad management. Team members can unload their frustrations one on one with the team leader or facilitator, rather than bring them, still burning, to the start-up meetings. The team leader and facilitator can then plan in advance how to acknowledge the past before moving on to create a positive feeling about doing things differently. These up front exercises also send the message that each team member matters to the team as a whole.

6 Plan the first meetings

When the above work is done, key team members, the leader and/or facilitator and key sponsors need to go through the agenda for the first meetings. They need to establish who will present what, and check to see that any proposed team building exercises will be new, culturally and organisationally relevant and at the right level of experience. They then need to collate and distribute any necessary documentation and pre-reading, view and book the venue and the social and culinary arrangements.

While the administrative side might seem less important, if it is done badly, it can have a major impact on the start up of the team.

For instance, the timing on the first day needs to take jet lag into account. A Korean coming to Finland may well sleep through presentations on the first evening if he arrived that morning. On the other hand, one French based team would purposefully schedule their meetings for 9.00am Monday morning so that the British manager would always be late and they could make important decisions without him!

It is impossible to stress how important it is for team leaders and external facilitators to get these six aspects of preparation right. The leader or facilitator is the easiest target for any frustration and anger that arises later on. One team decided that 'the facilitators were seeking conflict'. As the facilitators, we thought that the only message we were putting across was the need to integrate the differences between the two corporate and national cultures involved. Because only two key players had been interviewed before the meeting, the pending explosion of frustration, cynicism and anger around confused organisational boundaries, loyalties and trust had not been unearthed in advance. We learnt the need for extensive '3 × 1 preparation' the hard way as the team vented their ire to senior management.

Phase Two: First Meetings

Although it may seem counter-intuitive to action-oriented Americans, British and Scandinavians, teams that plan and work on their interaction first and start slowly on the task usually speed up exponentially towards the end.

If the task was climbing a mountain, then no team in their right minds would set out without carefully planning the route, the responsibilities, the ways in which they were going to avoid major pitfalls and how they were going to communicate, especially if things started going wrong. Most corporate tasks at managerial level are achieved through thinking, reading, meetings, discussion, e-mail and computerised document creation and exchange. For some reason, most people think you do not have to have the same kind of planning. The common misconception is that it will all fall into place as soon as the team starts to climb, as basically everyone assumes everyone else has the same ideas of how it should happen. However, when the team encounters the first crevasse they flounder and start arguing about basic procedures that should have been clear right from the start. Bringing all the different expectations and understanding of processes to the surface at the beginning and planning a common working approach is essential for the success of international teams. The preparation discussed above and best practices outlined below, help teams structure and speed up this process. Moreover we will keep stressing that structuring the interaction is the only way to speed up and ensure participation.

Most of the actions that need to be taken to manage the interaction have been referred to as 'team basics'[3], eg clarifying roles and goals, setting clear targets, establishing interdependent activities and mutual accountability. There are many good books on improving team performance that international team leaders and members can usefully read and that are suggesting useful ways of taking care of these issues[4]. The trouble is that few teams do it well. As stressed in Chapter One, all of the team basics need to be applied in international teams. Rather than go over the same ground, the point is to look at what more has to be done to manage the interaction between different nationalities and across distances. The building blocks for achieving the best interaction to fit the task need to be set in place at this point.

In hindsight, the two most appreciated issues in the start up sessions of Seagram's re-engineering teams were 'creating a clear set of behavioural rules and understanding the strengths and weaknesses in the team'.

Seagram drinks and entertainment company created high profile international teams who had eight months to recommend how to re-engineer the company's processes. Aside from these two 'basics', outlined above, most of the Seagram's team members felt that they developed as a team by working together. If the basics are set correctly at this stage, the team itself will develop the capacity to manage itself in the mid-phase. The first step in putting the basics in place is to make the link between the work of the project design team and the actual project team itself.

7 At the first set of meetings, explain the organisational strategy and policies, putting the purpose of the team in context. Jointly identify, prioritise and agree the mission, purpose, objectives and key success criteria

Companies create international teams to develop the big picture. If team members have never seen it, they are groping in the dark. Research on over 50 transnational teams[5] showed that explaining how the purpose of the team fits in with the overall organisational strategy helps team members to understand why they should go to all the trouble of working across organisational, geographical, temporal and cultural barriers.

Bad experience has taught us this golden rule: First gain commitment to a common direction, then explore differences. Otherwise un-channelled differences can blow up and land in your face.

Once the purpose of the team within the big picture is clear, then the team needs to identify what they want to achieve, how they are going to do it and what it should look like when the team gets there. Not everyone will agree on the words that describe these things*; words such as the mission, the vision, goals, targets, critical success factors, vivid descriptions etc. Keeping the language simple is important.

When it comes to establishing 'how?', the focus is on accessing the different expectations about what constitutes effective teamwork. Once the direction and goals that the team is working towards is agreed and understood by everyone, then the team needs to move onto the next step and build interrelationships face to face.

8 Emphasise building interrelationships when face to face

The most dissatisfied team in one piece of research were still asking each other's names as the team broke up. If the British and Americans rush off into the task, Latin and Middle Eastern team members may well remain silent because the proper introductions have not yet been made. The Americans and British may be culturally informed and yet still come across patronisingly saying 'well, we had better introduce ourselves' while tapping the table with a pencil. Most people agree[6] that trust is best established at the same time, in the same place. It is much harder across a distance.

If humour is integral for some people to establish trust, it does not translate well on paper. British exclamation marks are used to show that you are not serious about what you are saying, but they can be taken very seriously elsewhere. Speaking from British/Australian facsimile experience, exclamation marks can be interpreted as arrogant, conceited, manipulative and totally insensitive when you meant to be funny and to keep it light and open.

Trust is built in different ways in different cultures. Aspiring American presidents usually start poking fun at themselves and deriding their weaknesses in the last stages of a campaign. In Hong Kong they would never get elected. The British feel safe if they can understand each other's jokes, although they will probably tell them to each other standing shoulder to shoulder with a drink in hand, surveying the room rather than looking at each other. For most Germans, the idea of establishing trust after only a few meetings is meaningless. Most will wait to see the steadiness and quality of the work.

9 Consciously explore the cultural similarities and differences and resulting strengths and weaknesses of the team

This is perhaps the most important process of all in international teams . . . an in-depth analysis of what you are as a team. Having done this, you can then decide how to best work together. Here we very strongly recommend the use of the cultural value checklist illustrated in the next chapter. It focuses attention immediately on relevant similarities and differences within a common cultural

* Especially international human resource and training teams.

framework, creates a common visual display of what the collective results are on each issue and creates a level playing field for an in-depth highly structured discussion. The discussion needs to cover similarities or differences in professional cultures, preferred and expected leadership styles, different communication, decision making and feedback preferences. For instance if some people think that individuals should make final decisions and others prefer group consensus: a discussion of the reasons for the different preferences and a workable team approach can happen without either side feeling that theirs is the right or wrong approach. While dealing with a number of factors, one of the most important aspects of this work is to put in place agreed and culturally appropriate modes of feedback that will enable the team to work through any difficulties caused by cultural differences in the mid-phase.

Apart from ground rules to manage national differences on decision making, feedback and leadership styles, the team needs to develop a strategy for working with different levels of language fluency and other factors that create status differences within the team. As discussed in the last two chapters, setting up rigid patterns of speaking in turn will irritate fluent members. It is better to control the speed of speech and to have someone responsible for checking that each person is saying what he or she wants to say. The same person can also frequently visually summarise and paraphrase where they think the team has reached on the task and keep checking for total agreement. If there is more than one speaker of a particular second language, then giving them time out to check their understanding in their own language and summarise it back for the whole team can be helpful. It gives them a welcome break from the tiring process of listening to and speaking in a foreign language. These are examples of the ground rules that need to be established at this point.

Three things are happening simultaneously during these discussions. First, the basis of intercultural awareness and sensitivity is being established, the team is legitimising and appreciating their similarities and differences and assessing their strengths and weaknesses. By using an equitable cultural framework the team members will later be able to give each other feedback on behavioural issues without getting personal. Second, the team is setting the 'ground rules' for how they will best interact. Third, this process is highlighting which aspects of someone's being, cultural make-up and expected contribution will be considered important and it should keep the salient parts of someone's identity and contribution, often expertise, skill, experience, and discerning ability at the forefront of the teams interaction. Potentially irrelevant issues that can bias the interaction, such as age, sex, ethnicity, marital status can then stay in the background.

Setting ground rules in international teams is important. Our experience shows that however much you talk about and demonstrate the detrimental results of say, interrupting each other, or allowing international staff to dominate regional staff etc, it tends to go in one ear and out the other until these factors become visible in the team. What you tend to get at this stage is;

'Yes yes, we know we should be nice to each other, but can we get on with the task?' Even though it is often uphill work, and some people may only agree flippantly, establishing ground rules:

- Creates workable communication norms specific to that team.
- Creates a commitment within the team that all team members are responsible for generating the best interaction.
- Protects the views of minorities.
- Enables the ground rules to act as a neutral judge when conflict and bad behaviour start to take over.
- Creates a much broader 'field' in which creative and constructive argument can take place.

By the end of this process, which can take two to three hours in a new team, the eight factors described in Chapter Two have been made conscious. Some people are fascinated and others think it is a total waste of time, but even they often begrudgingly admit that if they had taken the pre-work seriously, they would not be encountering many of their subsequent difficulties. *'Oh we thought that was just an exercise for team building or something, not what we were really going to do.'* As the examples in the previous chapters show, if the team members and especially the team leader, lack intercultural sensitivities or have not established clear ground rules, stereotypes and organisational norms will probably prevail and some very upset members are likely to be excluded from meaningful interaction.

10 The final task of the team at this stage is to agree the first set of action plans

At this point, the team needs to agree what will be done, who will do it and by when, before the next meeting. Most importantly they need to agree how they are going to communicate, not only how they will use different technologies, but also the style of communication. Establishing a communication charter should specifically aim at managing any skewed geographical spread. This is where the information technology person from the project design team needs to present his/her findings and for the team to work through and formulate their needs. This process often prompts companies to get serious about establishing global e-mail and standard software packages. The advantages and disadvantages of different technologies are outlined in Chapter Seven.

How long does this first setting up phase last? It depends of course whether supportive systems are already in place or not and whether this is the first team of its kind in the company. It also depends on how well 3 × 1 preparation has been done, the length of the project and so on. One on-going team spent three two-day sessions over three months completing this part of the cycle. That amount of initial investment paid off eighteen months later when they hit serious interpersonal problems.

The important things to notice are that differences are opened up and explored only after a common understanding of purpose and goals has been established and that the team then works on the 'how' before the detail of the 'what'.

By the end of these first set of meetings, the team should be clear about what it is doing and where it is going. Culturally different norms, different levels of language fluency, different working practices, leadership styles, geographical distances, and status issues should have been made visible and integrated into a workable interactive process that best supports the task and incorporates each team member's individuality.

Phase Three: Mid Point

The mid-phase is often characterised by bursts of activity followed by periods of stagnation and poor momentum in which problems arise, the hidden agendas missed at the beginning can emerge and create what Steve Mitchell, an accomplished trainer in Wellcome, called 'strategic moments'. Aside from working through difficulties and 'strategic moments', the team needs to renew, review and undergo relevant mid-term training. The frequency of strategic moments, the severity of discomfort and the implications of how they are handled by the leader or facilitator all seem to be far greater in international teams than national teams. What exactly are strategic moments?

11 Work through strategic moments

Imagine a team where the Spanish half has been competing internally with the German half. The Spanish from the Spanish production plant do not want to reveal how far they have moved along with the marketing of a brand new product because they are convinced that the Germans from headquarters will steal their ideas and take the best markets. However, they are racing for a deadline with three other competitors. A team meeting is held. A big board is drawn up listing current activities and responsibilities. Suddenly the names of vice presidents and the chief executive are being given for who is responsible, with no names from within the team. The German head of production beckons the Spanish head of sales and storms out of the room. The team has reached a strategic moment. What happens next will make or break the team. If the leader or facilitator knows the history, was expecting the stand off and can lead the team through this moment, the likelihood is that old corporate patterns and years of antagonism and vested interests can be broken down. So while they may be extremely uncomfortable, strategic moments are also great opportunities for changing unworkable corporate habits. In fact, the team will be energised and enthused by the release of all the potential energy that was held in previous dysfunctional patterns. When cultural prejudices, ignorance and stereotyping are included in such a scenario, one can see why international teams tend to go through emotional and traumatic processes and key strategic moments before they start to benefit from their diversity.

In the above example, the facilitator pointed out that two key people had left the room and asked the team what it wanted to do. 'Oh, we want to discuss the product in general.' This was relayed to the two senior managers when they returned. The German head of production suddenly became very 'Spanish' and burst into a fully emotional tirade that if no-one on the team was going to take responsibility, then he was walking out for good. A small Spanish voice came from the back of the room to explain that they had been competing internally. Suddenly the dam burst and everyone was looking for constructive ways of moving forward and stayed late into the evening. It is the leader's or facilitators responsibility to get the team through such moments in the most creative way possible. The form of a strategic moment can vary from highly charged, 'over the top' emotional discharges to complete stony silences that are equally hard to work through. Courage, persistence, humour, and sometimes temporary deviation are all useful strategies that leaders and facilitators can adopt. The strange combination of a personal thick skin and yet high sensitivity to what is going on is also very valuable. For instance when faced with a Finnish group silence, one can insist that due to your cultural ignorance, you need to have the silence interpreted. Emotional outpourings and frustrations can be met by quiet acknowledgement and gentle feedback about someone's perspective and values.

As stated above, if the ground rules have been set tightly and clearly, the team has much greater freedom for creative interaction on the task and particular norms are less likely to dominate. If multiple options and rich pictures have been generated well, the team leader should expect the heat to rise as these options are forged into one path of action at the half time point. The ground rules have to be strong enough to take that heat as all the differences of opinion jostle through a narrow funnel. If they melt as the temperature rises, everything flows everywhere and no product is wrought. Strategic moments can be very healthy indeed. The point is to be prepared for them by having done in-depth homework in the first two phases. This is the time when 'knowing your team', understanding the inequalities and having workable ground rules pays off. The best way of visualising this is to use a concept from Drexler and Sibbet's extensive and useful team model[7] that stresses that teams move from freedom at the beginning of their teamwork, to constraint at the half-time point back to freedom as they have accomplished their task.

In Figure 4.2 after a short early argument the dominant norms either force people to fall into line, or leave the field of play completely. If a certain set of organisational norms or dominant patterns of interaction force the team members onto a narrow path early on, the material gathered will be limited and only a narrow outcome will emerge.

Figure 4.3 represents the participants initially arguing through many divergent points of view. The intense discussion is focused towards a point

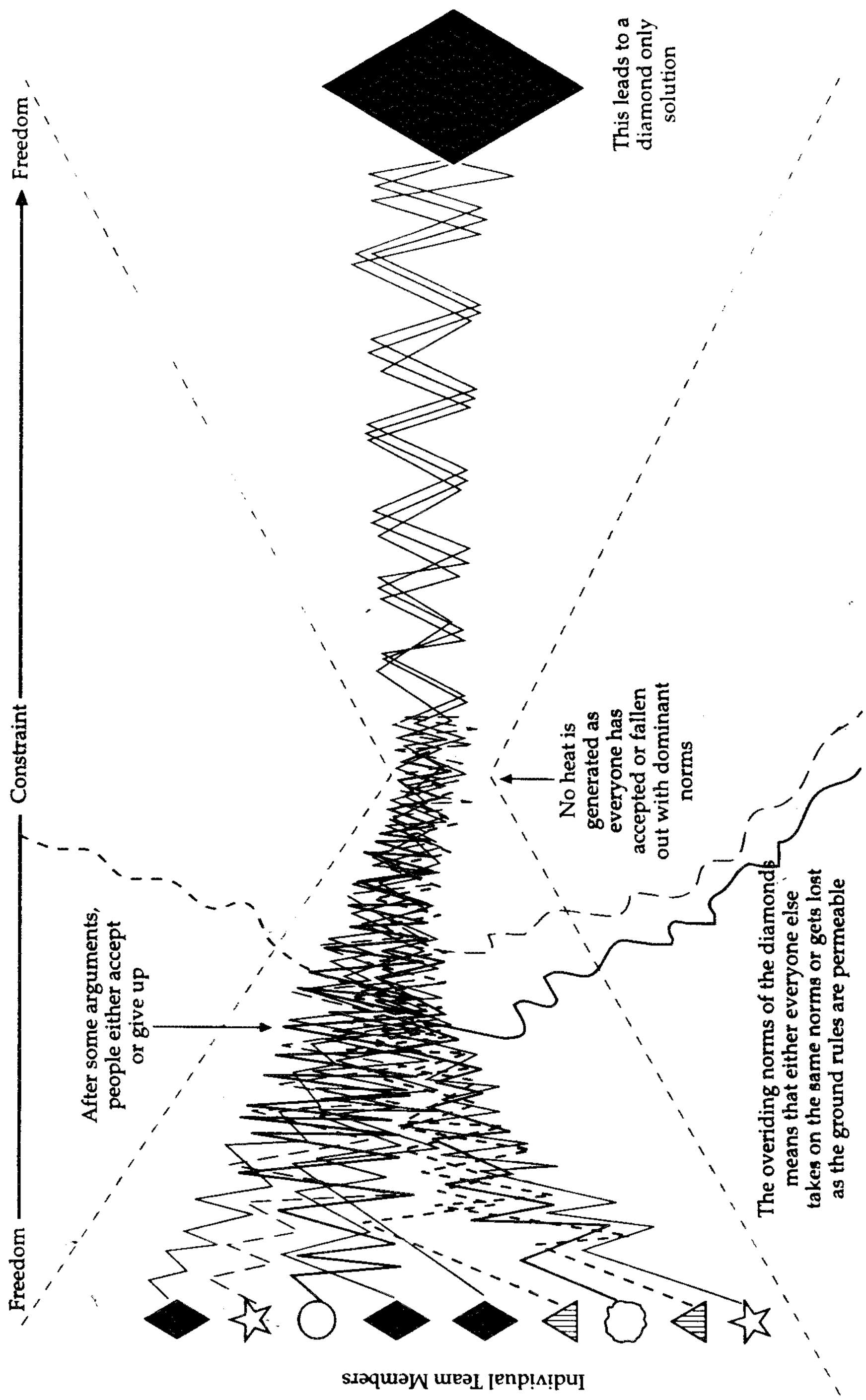

Figure 4.2: Ineffective use of freedom and constraint in teamworking

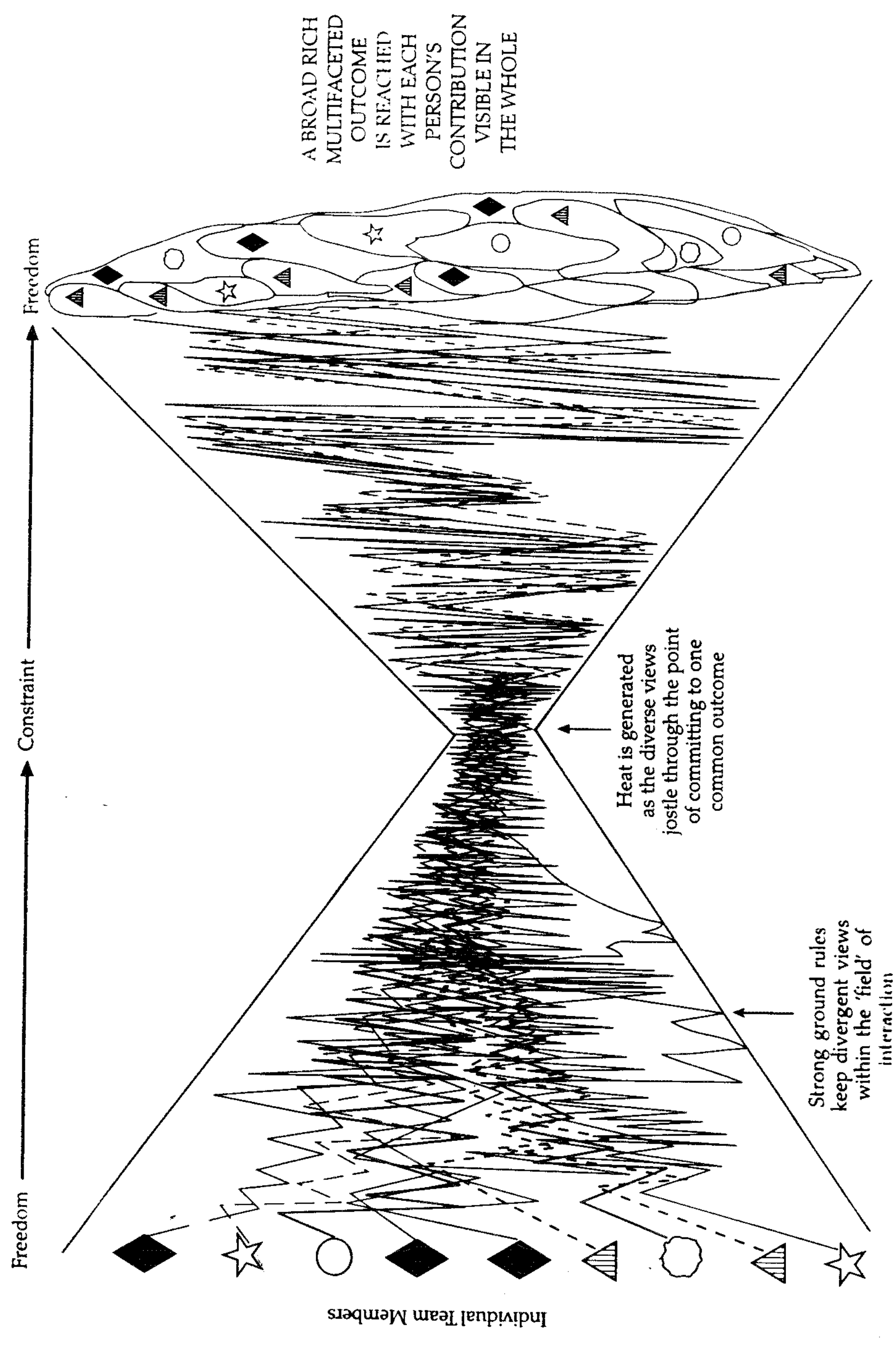

Figure 4.3: Effective use of freedom and constraint in teamworking

of maximum constraint where they have to agree the way forward towards their common outcome. The richness of the initial debate and subsequent focus and decision making allows a broad, rich, inclusive end product to be created. Unlike the 'diamond' only solution illustrated previously, well set ground rules that encompass each team member's preferences of how to interact as well as encourages their input, open up the field of play especially initially and so long as the boundaries are tight and elastic, people and ideas will bounce back into the playing field. Far more options can be created that then need to be channelled through the 'straight gate' leading to a common outcome. That outcome will contain more options, be argued against or supported from different perspectives and already be honed and customised to be implemented in many different contexts. If the ground rules have large holes in them, contributions can wander off track or be thrown out, and the outcome is poor.

We have seen that structured processes can overcome organisational biases that prevent a team from working at high performance. But structured does not mean rigid. It means creating an agreed field to play in[8]. If the temperature does not rise somewhere near the middle of the teamwork, it usually means that the team has not accrued the advantages afforded by the diversity of skills, viewpoints and experience available in the team. Something went wrong, as in the Bank 2 team described in the last chapter. As the team comes under pressure for action and decisions on the form of the final outcome, the potential for strategic moments greatly increases.

A word of warning is needed here. The richness that leads to excellent outcomes can collapse at any moment. Even good ground rules will not be enough. The richness needs to be constantly protected from dominant inertia. For example, one subgroup chose to superimpose an existing model on otherwise rich exploratory findings that might have led to new perspectives. After a heated and rich debate, two report writers chose not to restructure a table that was clearly only applicable to Western markets. Instead they agreed to make a few qualifying statements that most people would ignore. However good your ground rules, the team has to have the will or energy to maintain and use differences. You cannot 'legislate' it into happening. In fact, a lot of problems and poor results seem to arise from laziness, cynicism, inertia, wanting the quick fix, protecting your own turf, or a lack of courage to venture into the unknown or stick one's neck out to change prevailing norms.

Team leaders will often need to inspire, motivate, coerce, negotiate, cut deals, or strategically get angry. It is a tough and emotionally exhausting job.

After working successfully through any strategic moments and channelling heated debates, a team leader needs to make sure of everyone's involvement and the use of the feedback tools previously established.

12 Make sure that everyone is involved and uses the feedback tools established at the beginning

We have established that equal involvement does not equate with having everyone speaking the same amount. The only way to find out if everyone is involved as much as they want to be, is to ask. In fact, it is useful to carry out major 'health checks' every six months and to make mini verbal check ups throughout any face-to-face meetings. The main focus of a review is to establish that the pattern of interaction that has been set up is the best possible type to serve the needs of the task and the individual priorities in achieving that task.

Major reviews are a good opportunity to 'initiate' new team members. Part or all of the original exercises in phase two can be reworked to fine tune the goals, targets and vivid descriptions and to agree a new communication charter and working process to include the new members. They can be shown all the records of the first meetings so that they understand the history and development of the team.

As described in the next chapter, another part of the health check can be detailed observation and video feedback to highlight just how much one or two members are being excluded and the mechanisms by which other people are dominating the process. This is the time that the team leader needs to pay attention to the effects of different levels of language fluency, especially with differences in written and spoken main language abilities and the effect of unequal national status The team leader also has to look for signs of burn out and too much pressure between family and work. Expectations may need to be adjusted and communication patterns and work schedules improved accordingly.

13 Keep a check on the timing, space the milestones and use the time together and time apart to its full potential

It is helpful to spread out the milestones and keep a check on the timing. It is sensible to carry out process reviews in the lulls between bursts of activity on the task. Computer based Groupware technology can allow the exchange and manipulation of data and reports in different places at different times. Using the time apart for such information exchange means that expensive time together can be devoted to resolving difficult decisions and interpersonal difficulties (although sometimes, time apart may allow people to cool down and rethink their approaches). Time together is also useful for 'just in time' mid-term training such as new problem solving and decision making and creative conflict techniques.

14 Communicate what is being achieved and broadcast successes as they emerge

Managing the external boundaries of the team at this point will determine the impact that the final outcome has on the company. This is the time to broadcast interim successes and send out concept papers of what your final results will achieve for the company and individuals alike. This can be done through lunch time briefings, presentations to senior managers, newsletters, team pages on shared databases as well as one on one over lunches. What is important is to package the information in ways that people will read it. Don't send forty-page reports to busy senior executives with no summaries and sit around wondering why he/she never replies.

Communicating successes as they arise can maintain the interest and involvement of the sponsors, enable some interesting feedback and encourage the sponsors to advocate for the team as well as motivate the team members when they see the interest being taken. Broadcasting obviously puts extra pressure on the team members, especially those who feel that their reputation depends on coming up with a final polished product before letting the rest of the world in. But the price of not broadcasting interim successes and priming key stakeholders for the output can be high.

> The transatlantic quality assurance team in Wellcome worked quietly and successfully against the trend of separate UK/American teams, learning a lot about [illegible] the Atlantic. When two years later the head of their department had the [illegible] to restructure the whole of the R&D function into transatlantic teams, [illegible] came to the original team to ask how to do it. The one regret the excellent team leader had was not shouting louder at the time.

Team leaders also need to do anything that will keep the motivation up at this point, especially celebrate the interim successes. We are not suggesting placing either a Goofy or a Mickey mouse on European team member's desks on Friday afternoons. Nor placing an envelope of bonus money only on the desks of those team members who had been in the team for more than six months (with no explanation to the newcomers). However, publicly acknowledging team members involvement in preparing a team leader's external management review, publishing interim results and highlighting individual and team developments can all help to maintain a sense of ownership and belonging in the team.

15 Leaders sharing control and facilitators reducing their presence

As discussed in the following chapter, our belief is that facilitators are there to teach the team to manage themselves and so need to consciously reduce their presence at this point. Some external facilitators disagree with this view and almost become part of the team. However, if the facilitator cannot pass on his or her skills, how can the team members share their skills with new teams? Moreover, skilled facilitators who can cope when things are going badly wrong are usually in short supply. Similarly, if it is culturally appropriate, leaders should be controlling events as little as necessary by this stage and the team should be becoming self managing and accountable.

Phase Four: Closing Stages

16 Make sure everyone stays involved to the end

There is a great tendency to let team working collapse as deadlines press and especially to decide that the cost of involving distant members in finalising work is too great. This can undo a lot of earlier team building efforts and breed cynicism in those who feel suddenly excluded. This is where Groupware such as Lotus Notes, Novel's Groupwise, Collabra's Share and MS Outlook/Exchange to name a few, can really come into their own and prevent this kind of problem. If it has been introduced at the beginning, the team should be able to customise their work to suit their own needs.

17 Review the learning within the team

This is undoubtedly the most important part of wrapping up. Teams will only be able to work better together in the future if they can learn from their mistakes and share their successes. All the records of phase two and the interim reviews should be available. The performance on the task will ultimately be judged by the rest of the company, but immediate feedback can be actively sought from the sponsors. One team felt it had had a very difficult and turbulent time. However, when they got very positive feedback on their output from the Board, they began to change the way they felt about their difficulties and see them more as bouts of constructive conflict.

The team needs to review its process in a fairly formal way using all the background information to sort out what went well, what could be improved on, and to record specific intercultural problems and guidelines for other teams. Again written questionnaires and checklists can be helpful, as people may write down, especially anonymously, what they will not say in public. This written record demonstrates that as well as the task, the interactive process was something concrete, agreed upon and which developed over time. This is important.

It can be valuable to include the sponsors in the review process as it occurs, rather than collect their views and then feed it back to the team. Many international team sponsors have not been part of an international team themselves and cannot appreciate the peaks of enthusiasm and excitement and the troughs of despair. By participating in the review process they can begin to appreciate the energy and commitment that the team have contributed to the task.

This in turn makes them more able to sponsor future international teams effectively.

If you have worked with a facilitator throughout the lifecycle of the team, it can be valuable for a different 'neutral' facilitator to manage the review process. This enables the team facilitator to contribute to the content of the review and to provide the team with insights from their perspective. It also enables the whole team to be constructively critical about their interactive processes and the role the facilitator has played.

18 Celebrate the success and plan for the future

After their celebrations, the team needs to lay out an action plan of how the results can be fully implemented, evaluated and broadcast through the company. The team also needs to think about what the members are going to do next and if the project was longer than six months, how they are going to be re-integrated into the company and use the network that they have established in the team.

Sometimes new international project teams have no actual status in the company. It is regarded as high profile and good for personal development to be part of one, but often those that have stayed in the management line have gained more power and move up more easily.

19 The team needs to pass on what it has learnt to the rest of the organisation

The team needs to brainstorm how they are going to do this. In fact, this can also be a mid-phase (three) activity so that if there is a large group of new project leaders, they begin to explore ways to share their problems and creative solutions. Large formal gatherings attended by senior management are usually not conducive to sharing the mess ups. These are usually shared informally. Other methods that teams have suggested have included electronic databases, with the attendant problems of how to codify the learning to make it accessible, update it and manage its relevancy. One company set up a best practice office and all sorts of incentives for teams to share ideas. Social events and smaller scale forums are sometimes arranged around the larger formal reviews to which managers are already travelling. Newsletters, electronic white boards, mentoring schemes, a team leaders' network, lunch time briefings all usually figure as suggestions.

One large group of project leaders set up a smaller subgroup to see what would have most impact, was most practical and were then responsible for making it happen. Similarly a team needing to share its learning may need to set up a sub-team to spread the word. The methods chosen will depend on the organisation and probably the main national culture(s). Some cultures socialise easily out of hours, others do not. Some cultures will only take up what is passed on in person, others are happy learning from a computer. The chosen methods need to be multifaceted. Even so, the most concrete passing on should come as skilled team members go on to act as facilitators or proactive team members when they join another team. As we have emphasised from the start, internal and external facilitators should only act as catalysts for a process that then spreads 'systemically' throughout the organisation.

These nineteen practices form the basis of the four-phase model and it is important to note that the largest section is that which covers what needs to be done before the team ever meets. Some people say that nineteen practices are a lot for a new team to handle, which are the most important? As described before, it is an iterative process, so if the preparation is done well, then many problems will be avoided. However, the complete answer to the question of 'which one's are most important for my team?' can only be decided after understanding the model and knowing a specific team's main problems.

When a company is building a network of facilitators to support international teams, the model can create the framework for facilitators to share what they do at each stage and their different tool boxes. The key interventions that we have found useful at each stage are shared in the next chapter, along with an in-depth discussion of how to choose a facilitator and what a facilitator can do.

One of the overall goals of the interaction in an international team has often been described as 'intercultural synergy'. An alluring goal, but there are only vague hypotheses of what it is and how it happens, let alone which mixtures of skills and differences will most encourage it. So far, most people have opted for the 'recommended empathy' approach[9]. This goes something like 'understand your own cultural conditioning first then put yourself in the other person's shoes to try and understand their point of view. Then take the most relevant parts of each perspective and work out something new. This new culture may be reached through 'reconciliatory circles'[10] or through a process that builds on similarities and *fuses* differences' or, 'creates new forms of management and organisation that transcend the individual cultures of their members'[11].

Another common phrase 'integrating diversity', has been defined as 'combining elements into a unified result where the whole is greater than the sum of the parts and as such is synergistic'[12]. Reading such inspiring words can make the team leader feel good, creating the expectation that something truly out of the ordinary may happen in his/her team. However these ideas need 'unpicking' as well as relating to the day-to-day realities of being an international team.

First, no one thing can be greater than the sum of its parts except in very esoteric physics. What synergy can refer to is the process of working co-operatively and combining elements in such a way that the *effect* of that work is greater than if each person had worked independently. Using one main muscle allows me to bend my arm, using other groups of muscles allows me to clench my fist. If I do them in a co-ordinated way, clench first then lift, I can drink my tea. As the diversity in teams increases (cross national, functional, ethnic, gender, etc), more viewpoints, perceptions and experiences are expected to be brought to the whole. The down side is that team leaders need to work harder to co-ordinate and, as described in the previous two chapters, the team is more likely to have communication problems.

These are issues of co-ordination and process. There is, as such, no need to focus on what kind of 'new' culture a team will create for itself or whether this 'transcends' individual culture. We believe that this is unnecessary abstraction. Team members need to consciously share their individual approaches and then jointly weave a co-ordinated process that best fits their particular task and context. This sculpting leaves their individual viewpoints, perceptions, ways of seeing the world and communication styles intact, while also creating processes to access these differences at appropriate phases of the teamwork.

The first part of any sculpting process is a rough, fast and messy affair. Increasing precision is needed as the outcome becomes clearer, then each chisel blow or telephone call becomes more significant and has to be more finely tuned. The first team workshops are likely to be hot, steamy, intense and difficult, but the point is to provide the means for the team to learn to hone its own processes into a fine art. Mistakes and messiness can and need to happen early on.

We have witnessed enough broken alliances, destructive internal competition in loss making companies and half-baked results. Enough that is, to persuade anyone involved that actively doing something to make these teams work is worth it. Not doing anything tends to hurt a lot. Some teams are lucky and stumble across the goal of synergy and weave their differences into a working process that supports the task. However, unless they are skilled at managing their process, they often cannot explain how they achieved it. The best practices outlined in this chapter are the best way we have found to co-ordinate interaction and avoid disaster as well as being able to explain how you did it.

It is obvious that the model is primarily designed to fit a team with a specific task of set duration. As stated at the beginning, on-going teams need to take an interim activity as a starting point. Many companies do not see themselves as organised into tight teams with clear or on-going life cycles. International 'standing' work groups with expertise called in as needed often operate as loose networks. Even so, the key messages remain the same. 3×1 preparation for meetings; recognising and acknowledging differences; creating an open atmosphere where problems can be dealt with locally; using a variety of strategies to involve team members, especially temporary members; managing the geographical distance creatively and finding creative strategies to pass on the learning to the rest of the organisation.

Most international networks and teams are created to generate cross-border, cross-functional learning within the company or to achieve greater global efficiency by achieving an outcome that affects many people simultaneously. The dynamic interplay between global aims and local styles, similar goals but different ways of getting there are the sources of the potential energy to be tapped within multinational, multi-ethnic, multicompany and multifunctional teams. The life cycle model only provides the loom. It is up to each team to weave their brightest colours into the finest fabric they can achieve.