

Chapter Five

Facilitating International Teams and Key Interventions

The objective of this chapter is to highlight how and when international teams can use a facilitator, what to look for when selecting an effective international facilitator and to highlight some interventions that facilitators use, that have proven to be effective with international teams.

As highlighted in earlier chapters, like any team, effective international teams must have the technical expertise to accomplish the task assigned to them by their organisation. The team also needs the ability to get individual team members from across the globe all working in the same direction. Senior management and HR have a key role in creating a supportive organisational context (see Chapters Eight and Nine), but more importantly, the international teams must actively manage the organisational context within which they are operating. They need to ensure that key sponsors and resource managers are kept well informed.

Chapter 7 highlights the interpersonal skills and attributes required to be an effective international leader, yet many organisations still select international team leaders and members based solely on their technical expertise. They do so despite evidence that technical skills are not the most critical attribute of international team members. As such, many international team leaders and members are often initially ill equipped to manage the more complex interaction within these teams, as well as the team's relationship with the rest of the organisation. An effective international facilitator can help the team develop an awareness of the critical issues they need to attend to and provide the team with the necessary skills to be effective as the following story illustrates:

Facilitators: Providing a different perspective

An international team was established to develop standardised procedures for adhering to new EU regulations. Each European office already had existing local policies and procedures and these needed harmonising into a European wide policy. The team met and agreed what they needed to achieve. However, at a subsequent meeting little progress had been made by the French and Italian representatives. The Swedish team leader was baffled by this lack of progress, as both representatives appeared to be committed to the team goals.

A facilitator from the European HR organisation was invited by the team to come and work with them. The facilitator interviewed each of the team members by phone. She quickly established that team members understood the team's authority to make decisions in very different ways. Both the Italian and French representatives felt that the team could only make recommendations and that the final decision lay with the country general managers. The Swedish, British and German team members expected the team to make recommendations that would automatically be adopted by the general managers.

At the next face-to-face meeting, the facilitator worked with the team to bring the underlying assumptions about critical working practices into the open, practices such as decision making, communication, leadership, performance reviews. The team members were then able to set some ground rules about how they could work together effectively in the future. The facilitator also helped the team to create a map of their key stakeholders and to then develop a communication strategy to influence the critical individuals. This intervention helped bring further assumptions about who needed to be influenced to the surface as well as educated the team members about the cultural differences that existed between different functions and countries within the same organisation.

If an organisation is just beginning to work globally and has only recently created international teams, they often underestimate the level of support needed by teams. Many organisations and teams call in facilitators when team deadlines have been missed, when a team member resigns from the team or when other symptoms appear to indicate that the team is heading for or currently in 'crisis'. The facilitator is sometimes seen as a 'trouble shooter', only to be called on when the going gets tough as the following example illustrates.

Where angels fear to tread ...

A phone call from a team sponsor informs me that one of the critical product development teams is in trouble. The team was established nine months ago and the team leader saw no need for facilitation support. The team sponsor explains that all appeared to be going well until yesterday when two team members arrived in her office and requested that they be removed from the team. After a few phone calls, the team sponsor has established that morale is extremely low amongst all team members. The team has a critical milestone in five weeks. They must deliver. Can I please meet with the team leader and get the team back on track?

This experience is not untypical. Yet this approach to supporting international teams has a damaging long-term consequence for an organisation's ability to operate internationally. If the experience of working on an international team is so painful, staff will soon not be prepared to work on them. Experience shows that when international facilitators work effectively with teams throughout their lifecycles, they can ensure that the 'strategic moments' experienced by the team are crafted into performance enhancing experiences and do not destroy the team's ability to function effectively. As one team member commented to her team facilitator *'we should have used you as preventative medicine rather than accident and emergency – it would have been less painful all round'*.

If a team chooses to work with a facilitator from their conception, they are demonstrating a commitment to ongoing learning – in good times and bad. This is likely to make the team experience more rewarding for the team members, it will enhance team performance and team members are more likely to be willing to serve on other international teams in the future.

What Is a Facilitator and When Do You Need One?

In the simplest terms, the role of a facilitator is to enable an international team to enhance its performance. For some, facilitation is passive and internally focused. In this case, the facilitator observes the interactions of the group and then provides 'off-line' feedback to the group to help them develop their awareness of the way they are working together. The focus, with a passive style of facilitation, is mostly on how the team itself is working.

Yet, as mentioned in earlier chapters, the relationship of an international team with the rest of the organisation is critical for its success and therefore, a facilitator of international teams needs to keep this external perspective clearly in focus.

The model of facilitation that we are advocating for working with international teams is an *active and externally focused role*

The role of an active and externally focused facilitator could include:

- Coaching individual team leaders and members on working practices to enable them to work more effectively together.
- Supporting teams in managing the organisational context within which they work as this significantly impacts their ability to achieve their tasks.
- Providing skill development to teams as they require it rather than all at once at the beginning of their lifecycles. This enables teams to access skills as and when the task requires, rather than learning skills that they cannot put into practice or have forgotten about by the time they do need them.
- Facilitating meetings of the whole team. This enables team learning to take place that immediately impacts the team's ability to achieve its task.
- Designing process interventions to improve performance of the task.

Some of the advantages of this style of facilitation are:

- It can speed up the performance of an international team as interventions are tailored to the needs of each team.
- It actively develops the capabilities to operate globally as and when the teams require them.
- By watching facilitators role model best practice, team leaders and members can learn fast and the facilitator becomes redundant as soon as possible.
- The facilitators can carry best practice and learning from one team to another.

Whilst we advocate an active and externally focused style of facilitation, the specific activities undertaken by a facilitator are contingent on the organisational context in which the team is operating and the experience, skills and knowledge of the team leader and members. There is no universal formula for success: each international team is unique.

The aim of the facilitator should be to transfer his or her skills in enhancing the interaction and external relationships to the team, so that the team can manage itself. A facilitator can then systematically reduce their involvement. The time scale of this transfer of learning will vary according to the context of each team. If team members are keen to develop their own facilitation skills, this can happen after a few initial meetings, with the team calling on the facilitator for difficult meetings only. Sometimes a facilitator will need to be involved with the team for a longer period of time because all the team members need to actively participate in the *content* of a particular discussion and cannot simultaneously manage their *process*.

The critical issue is for the facilitator not to create dependence. This can happen when the team members are not willing or able to undertake facilitation

themselves. An effective international team facilitator constantly challenges and questions a team as to why they feel they need the continued services of an independent facilitator. Thus the use of the facilitator should be built into the reviews of a team's working practices. The exit of the facilitator should be contracted at the beginning of the team's lifecycle and this contract reviewed periodically to ensure the facilitator is still adding value.

In summary, your team may need a facilitator because:

- ***The complexities of working in an international team are new to both the team leader and team members.***
- ***The team is much more skilled in the technical side of the task than in managing the process.***
- ***The task demands that all the members will be exclusively focused on the content or much heated debate and disagreement is anticipated.***
- ***Although experienced, the team feels that it could benefit from some alternative techniques and some feedback on how they are managing their process.***

If you have decided that an effective international facilitator is needed, how should you go about selecting or developing one?

Selecting and Developing a Facilitator

The facilitator's role as described is a challenging one – you are working on intellectual, emotional as well as physical levels simultaneously. The role requires a range of skills, knowledge and experience to carry it out successfully. One of the pleasures and frustrations of doing this work is that there is always more to learn. What we are therefore offering to you, the reader, is not a definitive competency profile of the ideal international facilitator that you could use to design your selection process, but rather a number of key areas that you might want to explore with potential facilitators. Some of these areas are skills that can be developed, some are knowledge based that can be learned and some are grounded in experience.

A word of caution is necessary at this point. There are very few individuals who possess all the attributes that will be discussed. One of the most effective ways of working with international teams is to co-facilitate with facilitators of complementary skills and experience working together to meet the needs of the team. This has the added advantage of simultaneously developing the range of skills of each individual facilitator. It is likely that the framework provided here will be used more frequently to develop individuals with interest and

enthusiasm for this area, rather than select individuals who already possess all these attributes.

Skills

- Diagnostic and analytical skills
- Conflict resolution skills
- Language skills
- Working with unfamiliar topics
- Possesses extensive toolkit of interventions
- 'Real time' planning and design
- Culturally responsive feedback styles

A number of the skills mentioned here are not specific to international facilitators, but are included in this discussion to demonstrate the range and depth of skill that needs to be acquired before working effectively with international teams.

Diagnostic and analytical skills

An international team's facilitator can use questionnaires and/or interviews to assess the dynamics and needs of a team prior to the initial meetings. He or she will then need to make continual refinements to this assessment throughout the life cycle of the team. The facilitator also needs to be able to make judgements about which diagnostic tools are culturally appropriate for the situation. For instance, by looking at what a person chooses to say, the amount of personal disclosure and how they say it, sometimes open format biographies can tell you an enormous amount about a person, even if you do not get standard comparable information. The facilitator needs to be able to objectively analyse and make sense of the responses. The range of diagnostic tools available to the international facilitator is discussed later in the chapter.

Conflict resolution skills

A facilitator of an international team is often faced with a number of dilemmas – even in her own choice of actions. By adopting a particular approach, she may accommodate some of the team and alienate others. The numerous agendas, organisational and personal, which are often present within international teams, increase the potential for diverse views on a particular issue. If these are not handled sensitively, they can soon escalate into conflict. This diversity can also create undercurrents that make accurate diagnosis difficult. As pointed out in Chapter Three, recognition of the varying expression of conflict by different nationalities is also a skill that needs to be developed. For instance, what is taken to be aggressive behaviour by one team member may well be seen as

appropriate debate and discussion by another. Developing culturally appropriate conflict resolution skills is a critical part of an international facilitator's development.

Language skills

In many international teams, English is the chosen working language and most facilitators would need a strong command of the English language to work in this environment. However, the ability to be able to work in the mother tongue of team members enhances a facilitator's depth. It can also be seen as a symbol that the facilitator is credible. A facilitator must take care that if she is fluent in the languages of the dominant cultures of the organisation, that she does not reinforce this dominance. As described in Chapters Two and Three, a facilitator also has to be sensitive to the way a language is used and to the meanings of different silences and interruption patterns.

Working with unfamiliar topics

Often a facilitator will be working with a team whose remit is a highly technical one: eg development of a new global technical specification for microchips; registration of a novel medicine for Alzheimer's; agreeing the project plan for a network of hydroelectric power stations along the length of the Amazon. A key skill is the ability to follow the flow of the discussion, to be able to identify diversions and digressions and summarise key themes without having a detailed knowledge of the topic under discussion. Good facilitators do some homework before the first team meeting. Much credibility is gained by demonstrating a willingness to understand key issues and technical terms from specialist staff.

Possesses extensive toolkit of interventions

This skill is particularly critical when working with an international team. There is a need to have a wider and deeper range of interventions at your disposal in order to accommodate the myriad of cultural preferences present in the teams. Effective international facilitators will examine and experiment with a newly acquired tool or technique to assess its cultural bias as what may work in one culture may be highly offensive in another. 'Does the team fly by the seat of its pants?' may be fine in America, but will confuse most Latin Americans, Europeans and Africans. International facilitators cannot assume that one model fits all. Again, details of types of interventions are discussed later in the chapter.

'Real time' planning and design

Session and meeting design is a fundamental skill of effective international facilitators. Inexperienced facilitators should invest significant time prior to working with the team, by working collaboratively with the client to agree not only the outcomes of the task, but also agreement on the processes to be used. A good design, owned by the client, will provide a solid foundation to work with a team for the first time.

A hallmark of an experienced international facilitator is the ability to 'think on one's feet'. They are able to stay engaged with a team and follow the flow of the discussion, whilst simultaneously anticipating what problems may arise from the discussion and deciding what strategies can be adopted to bring the issue to a satisfactory resolution. They are able to plan meetings thoroughly and yet are prepared to change that plan as issues emerge – sometimes the original design will change many times during the course of the meeting. The skill to 'think on one's feet' is developed over time through working with a range of international teams.

Culturally responsive feedback styles

Developing a range of feedback styles is important if facilitators are going to work effectively with multicultural teams. Understanding that your natural style of feedback is not universally appropriate is a critical early lesson. You can develop this skill by knowing your own personal feedback preferences. You can explore with the team how they wish to handle feedback. Be sensitive to the level of self disclosure that is culturally appropriate for the individuals you are working with. Partnering with a co-facilitator with a different style can be a useful way of experiencing alternative styles of working with teams.

Knowledge

- Knowledge of organisational development (OD)
- Knowledge of business principles
- Knowledge of how to facilitate change in organisations
- Knowledge of cultural norms and intercultural communication literature
- Knowledge of adult and experiential learning in different cultures

There are several fields of knowledge that experienced international facilitators draw on. Some of these are prerequisites to developing the skills discussed earlier, but some are important in their own right. The purpose of this discussion is to highlight the relevant fields of interest – each has an extensive body of literature which readers can access – rather than to discuss the topics in any detail.

Knowledge of organisational development (OD)

An emphatic message throughout this book is that international teams exist within organisational systems and the nature of the organisational system has a significant impact on the effectiveness of teams. For facilitators to work successfully with international teams, they need to understand how organisations function and how to identify the key mechanisms and levers within the system that teams can use to facilitate their success. They need to understand how to intervene in the wider system so that they can coach and support the teams they are working with on how to manage their external relationships.

Knowledge of business principles

Although it is not necessary to have a formal qualification in business to be an effective international team facilitator, it is critical that the facilitator knows the key components of a business, understands the key interconnections between the parts and has sufficient awareness of the key drivers. The facilitator can then appreciate the frequent conflicting demands made on international team members and help the team to put their task into the wider organisational context.

Knowledge of how to facilitate change in organisations

To successfully accomplish their goals, many international teams will need to facilitate change within the wider organisational system. Facilitators need to know a range of models and strategies for how change occurs in organisations in order that they can educate the teams they are working with and provide them with appropriate responses.

Knowledge of cultural norms and the intercultural communication literature

Whether or not they are using them directly, an international facilitator needs to know the detail of and to have assessed the usefulness of the work on cultural dimensions.* They need to have a rough idea of where different nationalities lie on different dimensions and examples of the implications. They need to build up a storehouse of stories and anecdotes that demonstrate all angles of cultural difference.

Both Hofstede's and Fons Trompenaars' work of how different cultures vary across certain value dimensions are readily available for use as common frameworks. The facilitator has to demonstrate expertise, to know the latest work and books that address cultural differences. This knowledge does not replace the experience of having lived or worked in other cultures, but it adds

* See Appendix One

important tools and credibility. Anecdotes are important to show the range of the facilitator's experience and also to turn around certain situations. If one nationality is treating another with disdain, a quick story showing that people from that nationality can make mistakes or look stupid, from another angle, can send a strong hint of the need for a change of attitude, before more direct action is needed.

Knowledge of adult and experiential learning in different cultures

International teams often lack the required skills to successfully meet the challenges they have been set. The role of the facilitator is therefore often an educator, assisting the team to learn and develop the appropriate skills as required. In order to be able to do this, facilitators need to have an understanding of the way adults learn in different cultures and to be able to adapt the learning experience to the learning styles within the team.

Knowledge of a wide variety of experiential learning techniques is invaluable. Any tool or learning approach which does not rely on the individual's command of the chosen working language (usually English) is particularly appropriate for international teams.

Experience

- Living through major change
- Engaging with the organisation and the team
- Working with your cultural bias
- Political awareness

Experience is probably the most intangible aspect of an international facilitator's role. What we offer here are observations based on facilitating international teams over many years.

Living through major change

An observation we have made about the most successful international facilitators we have worked with, is that they have all experienced significant personal life transitions and have developed a range of healthy coping strategies. Many have lived for extended periods of time immersed in another culture. This experience reinforces the fact that no one view, including one's own, is right or wrong, only different. It often forces you to re-assess a wide range of values. This can help you realise that you can change much of your mindset without losing your core identity. This flexibility, not to hold or be held to a set intellectual line or approach, is essential if you are going to facilitate an international team.

Perhaps long-term experience in another culture is not essential, major life

shifts such as marriage, divorce, redundancy can all teach the same lessons. Good facilitators have often had to cope with upheaval and considerable change and have used these experiences to learn more about themselves. This leads to an emotional resilience that can enable them to remain grounded when the teams or organisations they are working with become dysfunctional.

Engaging with the organisation and the team

Knowing when to accept an invitation to work with a particular international team and when to say no is a judgement that you can develop. As a company internal facilitator, you will already have made the decision to engage with the organisation and your experience should be used to identify where your skills and knowledge can be most appropriately applied to enhance the performance of the organisation's international teams.

You need to learn how to avoid situations when the facilitator's role is inappropriately defined. This can occur when the team does not wish to learn themselves and builds a dependency on the facilitator. This does not develop the capability of the team members to run effective international teams without external support and therefore does not enhance the long-term team and organisational performance. At the most extreme, courage is needed to withdraw from a situation, if it is not possible to influence the view of the client to a more healthy and balanced relationship.

In one such case, an HR manager of a group of 30 had insisted that the facilitator only observe and give feedback. She worked hard to get clarity that this was what he really meant. The answer was always yes, only observe and give feedback afterwards. During his presentation, the manager stopped in midstream and asked the facilitator to take over. Had she stood up at that moment, he would have lost all credibility with his entire team. The facilitator smiled and stayed seated and hurriedly started to write some notes for him to use. Afterwards the manager said he was unimpressed and did not understand what her role was.

As well as being asked to be a passive observer, warning bells should also go off when the leader wants to use the facilitator to push a certain agenda, or if they are being asked to co-facilitate with someone who has a very fixed intellectual idea of the way things should happen. These are examples of when to consider saying no.

Experienced facilitators working across a range of teams within an organisation can also play a valuable role by observing the patterns and themes emerging and summarise those for the organisation. Giving overall feedback while maintaining the confidentiality and discretion of each team, can help the organisation to identify systemic issues that need to be addressed in a broader

context. Resolution of issues that exist in the wider organisation can enhance the environment for the individual teams.

Working with your cultural bias

A facilitator cannot support international teams effectively unless they have recognised that they have a particular cultural lens through which they view the world. Their work is inherently culturally biased. However, as mentioned, effective international facilitators have developed an appreciation that it is only a bias and there is no one 'right' way. It is important to allow oneself to be laughed at when one's bias becomes evident.

Each of us starts with a preferred 'toolkit' that we have developed over time, with which we are most comfortable and find to be most effective. We are not saying that these tools and techniques should be ignored. However, just because something is considered 'best practice' in one culture, does not make it universally applicable. Each time an international facilitator begins to work with a new team, they must use their experience to judge the appropriateness of each intervention, dependent on the cultural preferences of the team. There are no universal answers.

Political awareness

Experienced international facilitators have developed a sensitivity to the *political environment* of the organisation in which international teams operate. International teams are often a microcosm of the wider organisation and issues faced by the team are often symptomatic of difficulties in the wider system. Teams need to recognise these pressure points and leverage them to their advantage. Facilitators are often well positioned to sense these pressure points, as they are not so closely focused on the task. This enables them to work with the team in managing the team's boundaries effectively. They can coach the team to begin to focus externally and to sense what is happening in the organisation, which might impact their ability to do their job. Helping the team to understand the informal as well as the formal organisational system can also facilitate team performance. A word of warning at this point – this organisational knowledge and the insights into the informal system can be threatening to some managers and team members. In one organisation team members became suspicious of facilitators who were assigned to work with them, often referring to them as 'management spies'. It is critical to explicitly negotiate the confidentiality contract with team sponsors, leaders and members to prevent this concern emerging.

Three other critical issues should be mentioned here although they are neither skills, knowledge or experience. However, they should be actively explored if you are either considering becoming an international team facilitator or looking to select or develop one.

Passion

Some individuals have a passion for working with people from different countries and have strong feelings about the negative impact of narrow-minded prejudices. We are not suggesting that being a cross-cultural facilitator is like being a new age missionary – spreading the word of universal brotherhood, as a participant once suggested. However, when choosing a facilitator, if you do not get the feeling that the person you are looking at or developing is not passionate about this work, then look elsewhere. There will be times when the facilitator needs to be fully present with all faculties working, digging and probing for long periods of time. That stubbornness, passion, curiosity, whatever you want to call it, to get to the end of the job whatever it takes, and to enthuse others along the way is essential and contagious. It will win the team's respect.

Physical and emotional resilience

The very nature of the role involves significant amounts of travelling, often alone, and working across several time zones. Even when you are working from your home base, you are working at unsociable hours in order to be able to connect with team members in other time zones. This plays havoc with your personal and social life and individuals need to explore whether this fits with their preferred lifestyle. You have to be able to nurture yourself in far-flung places when the going gets tough, like recovering from having to start the karaoke session as guest of honour when you did not know any of the songs on the record.

Extensive travelling can also take its toll on your health and individuals need resilience to be able to perform effectively even if they have just stepped off a plane after a 13-hour flight. Maintaining some balance and ensuring that you give yourself time to relax and recharge is critical – workaholics burn out and they do not provide the teams with positive role models.

Emotional and professional support

Given the nature of the work, we cannot emphasise enough how important it is to ensure that you have a robust support network – both emotionally and professionally. Working with international teams often means you are uncovering messy issues and working in the shadowy side of the organisation. If you are an internal consultant, this can be a very exhausting place to be. Some mechanisms we have found useful are:

Co-facilitating

Working in partnership with another colleague. This provides you both with the opportunity to observe each other and provide feedback on style and

habits. It enables one of you to observe the group's reactions to the other's interventions and suggest how to do things differently if things get stuck.

Supervision

We use this word in the counselling sense. Identify someone who you can meet with on a regular basis to talk through your experiences with the international teams. They should be able to help you to sift through your reactions to the teams and separate your emotional responses from your professional judgements. They should help surface your biases, prejudices and assumptions that are blocking you being effective in working with the teams.

Key Interventions Throughout the Team's Lifecycle

Having explored the key attributes of an international team facilitator, the latter part of this chapter focuses on the interventions that can be used throughout the team's life cycle. The previous chapter outlined a model of best practice for working with international teams and what teams can do at each stage of their life cycle. Facilitators have identified a number of interventions (tools and techniques) which are effective when used with international teams.

One technique which can be used throughout the life cycle of the team and which has proved very successful with a range of international teams, is 'Metaplan'. This is a brand name for a low technology group brainstorming and prioritising technique that uses pin boards, large sheets of brown paper and a range of shaped cards and templates. It is well structured, makes everyone's contributions visual and helps to prevent anyone dominating or being excluded from the process. The use of Metaplan or other nominal grouping techniques can be helpful in bringing out the different ways in which individuals understand the goal and task. It has many advantages for use with international teams as highlighted in Figure 5.1.

Advantages of Metaplan

- Gets people to write before they talk – this plays to introverts and reflective cultures and allows participants working in their second or third language time to contribute fully.
 - It keeps in check the extroverts and dominant cultures in a non-confrontational way.
 - Gets a lot of ideas contributed in a very short space of time.
 - It is simple technology and can be used anywhere.
 - It gets participants on their feet which changes the pace and keeps the energy high.
 - It brings the group physically together around the Metaplan boards for grouping and prioritising.
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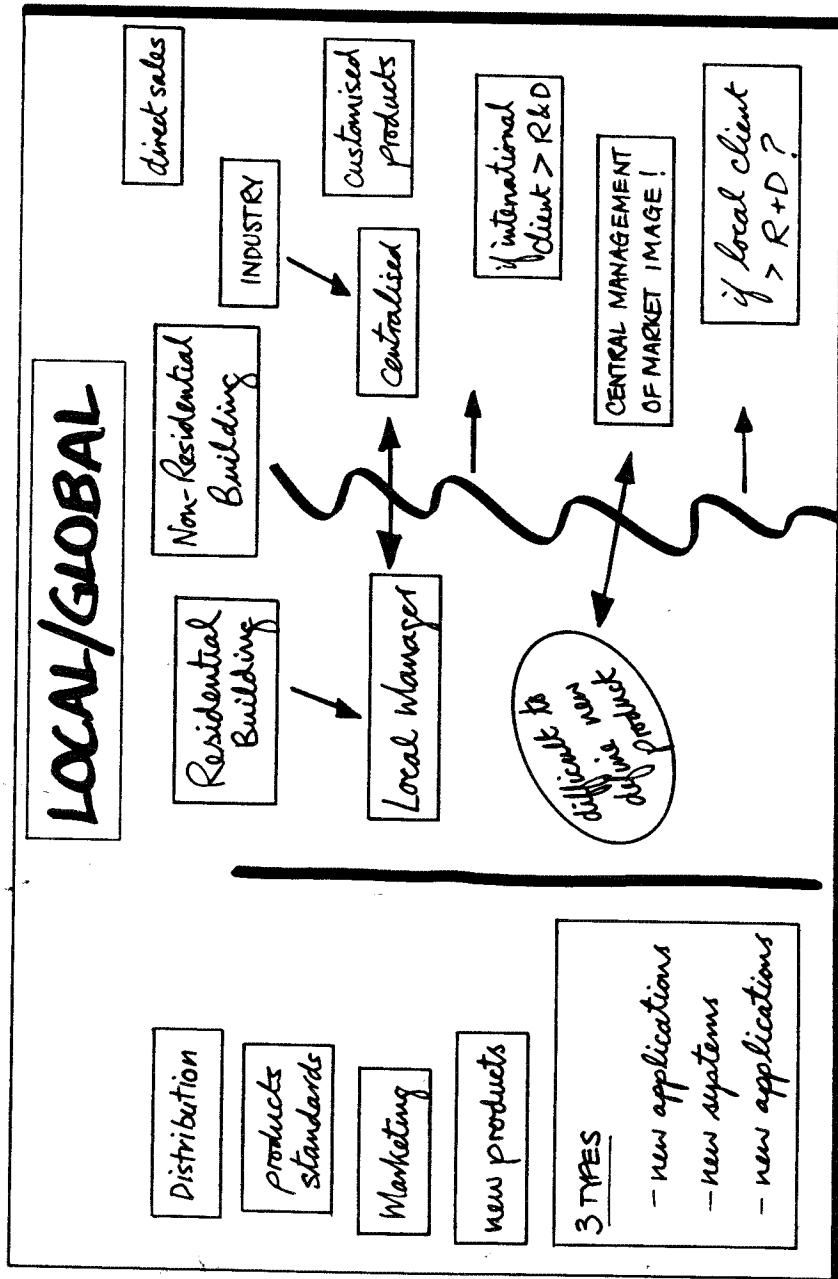


Figure 5.1: Example of a completed Metaplan Board

Phase One: Start up, Pre meeting

Before the first meeting, a facilitator needs to familiarise herself with all the issues that the team leaders have been considering (see Chapter Four) and have thought about the team. The key action here is to get to know the team so that difficulties can be anticipated. The eight factors highlighted in Chapter Two, provide a framework to structure this initial familiarisation process. As noted in Chapter Four, this preparatory stage of working with international teams is often underestimated. Yet a thorough preparation creates significant dividends once the team starts working. If the team has chosen to work with a facilitator (s)he needs to ensure that sufficient time is available for preparation.

This preparation consists primarily of data gathering, diagnosis of the main issues likely to impact the team and designing the first interactions of the team. A facilitator needs to take into account the most appropriate way of gathering this initial information about the team. This will be the first interaction with team sponsors, leaders and members and the facilitator needs to ensure that no cultural blunders occur at this early stage that may adversely impact the ongoing work with the team.

For example, in cultures that value developing relationships as a basis for conducting business it is preferable to do the initial data gathering in person. Face to face or telephone interviews can be used to identify expectations and concerns of all the team members and begin to build trust between team members and facilitators. Some individuals will feel very uncomfortable and even offended if they receive a pack of information and questionnaires through the post, with no previous personal interaction.

Questionnaires, checklists, inventories are all useful tools for gathering data about a variety of topics: personality; work style; leadership preferences; values. The choice of questionnaires available to an international facilitator is extensive, yet some are too complex, culturally biased or too simplistic to use with international teams. Care must be taken about the language used in questionnaires – does it use idioms that are inappropriate for team members who do not have English as their first language? Sometimes simplicity is the key, as the following example illustrates:

A highly mixed international team wanted to create a middle ground between totally impersonal and over personal feedback. They chose a framework where green stood for people, red for action and blue for ideas, and analysed their preferences. Later on, during the teamwork, 'Excuse me Mr Ho, can you be a little less red and a bit more green' was an inoffensive way for an Australian to tell a Hong Kong Chinese man to stop being so aggressive and fall in line with the team. Even Mr Ho laughed.

Many facilitators from Western cultures may be used to using a range of questionnaires to elicit information about the team members' personalities, work style, learning or communication preferences; values and working practices. This can provide the facilitator with valuable insights prior to working with a team. However, this benefit has to be weighed against the risk of upsetting team members who feel uncomfortable about disclosing such personal information before meeting and working with the other members of the team.

Phase Two: First Meetings

The initial interactions of international teams can take place face to face or remotely. Experience has demonstrated that if teams are going to meet face to face, then they benefit most, early on in their life cycle. This enables the team members to establish strong ground-rules that are workable and understood by all members of the team. During these first meetings a number of interventions have proved to be effective across a range of international teams. These can be done face to face or remotely using videoconferencing.

As emphasised in the previous chapter, the most important first step is to get a shared understanding and commitment to the overall purpose and deliverables of the team by the team sponsors, the team leader and team members. This is no different than working with homogenous teams but can be a more complex and lengthy process due to the range of diverse backgrounds, and therefore the variety of views and assumptions. Teams that rush this task and do not develop real clarity will only find that they are forced to attend to it in future meetings. This is not to say that due to emerging issues, the deliverables may not change over time – organisational reality suggests this will always be the case. However, discussing and agreeing subsequent changes to timelines, resources, deliverables is much easier if team members have at least all started on the same page.

For better or worse, outward bound courses are becoming a popular way of aiming to build this initial trust amongst team members. Unfortunately, or fortunately for some, there is little evidence that hanging off cliffs together helps long-term performance on business tasks. Our experience has shown us that working creatively on the actual task that the team has to deliver provides a much richer environment for learning and ensures that the teams get an accelerated start. All of the interventions we recommend are therefore aimed at encouraging the teams to address the real issues facing them as a team. Some of the exercises that can be used in these team start-up sessions are outlined below:

- Mapping the team life cycle
- Role negotiation
- Stakeholder analysis
- Establishing working practices
- Communication charters

Mapping the team life cycle

Map out the four phases of the team life cycle for the whole team on large sheets of paper or flipcharts (see Figure 5.3).

Get the team to brainstorm what needs to happen in each stage. Then identify and fill in any gaps and discuss how to implement them. This helps the team see the context of the journey they are about to embark upon and highlight where they are going to need extra resources and will need to manage the organisational context.

Role negotiation

Enabling the team to get clarity about who is responsible for what and surfacing assumptions about the way work will get done is a critical early task for international teams. As a first step, team members need to be clear about what needs to be achieved by the whole team and then identify who is going to be responsible for what. At this point, the facilitator needs to ensure that the team is not just focusing on the tangible tasks and deliverables, but also allocates responsibilities for issues like managing external boundaries; communicating with team sponsors; managing team learning etc. This should not all be left to the team leader. One participative way to do this is to have large boards, each one headed with a key role, eg Project team leader, team manager, facilitator and team member. One vertical half of the board is for questions and the other half is for answers. The team then splits into small groups who each take a board and start listing questions about that role. After ten minutes the small groups circulate to the next board and add questions and start trying to answer the other questions. This goes on until each group has written on each board and then the questions and answers are discussed in plenary.

It is particularly important that team members gain a shared understanding about how their roles on the team interact with their roles back in the local workplace. Often international teams are established in addition to individual's existing responsibilities. It is then critical to establish local manager's expectations with regard to their staff participating on this team?

Once roles are clarified, the team needs to work out suitable appraisal and development schemes for team members who are being fully seconded for a longer period. If the team members are part-time members of the team, then the balance of their team work with their line work needs to be worked out and mechanisms for resolving potential conflicts agreed.

Stakeholder analysis

This is one of the most important first tasks that a team needs to undertake. It often needs to happen in parallel with clarifying the team's purpose and deliverables. Only if a team can accurately identify the myriad of stakeholders (often with conflicting needs and expectations) can they be sure they are delivering the right output to the right person at the right time.

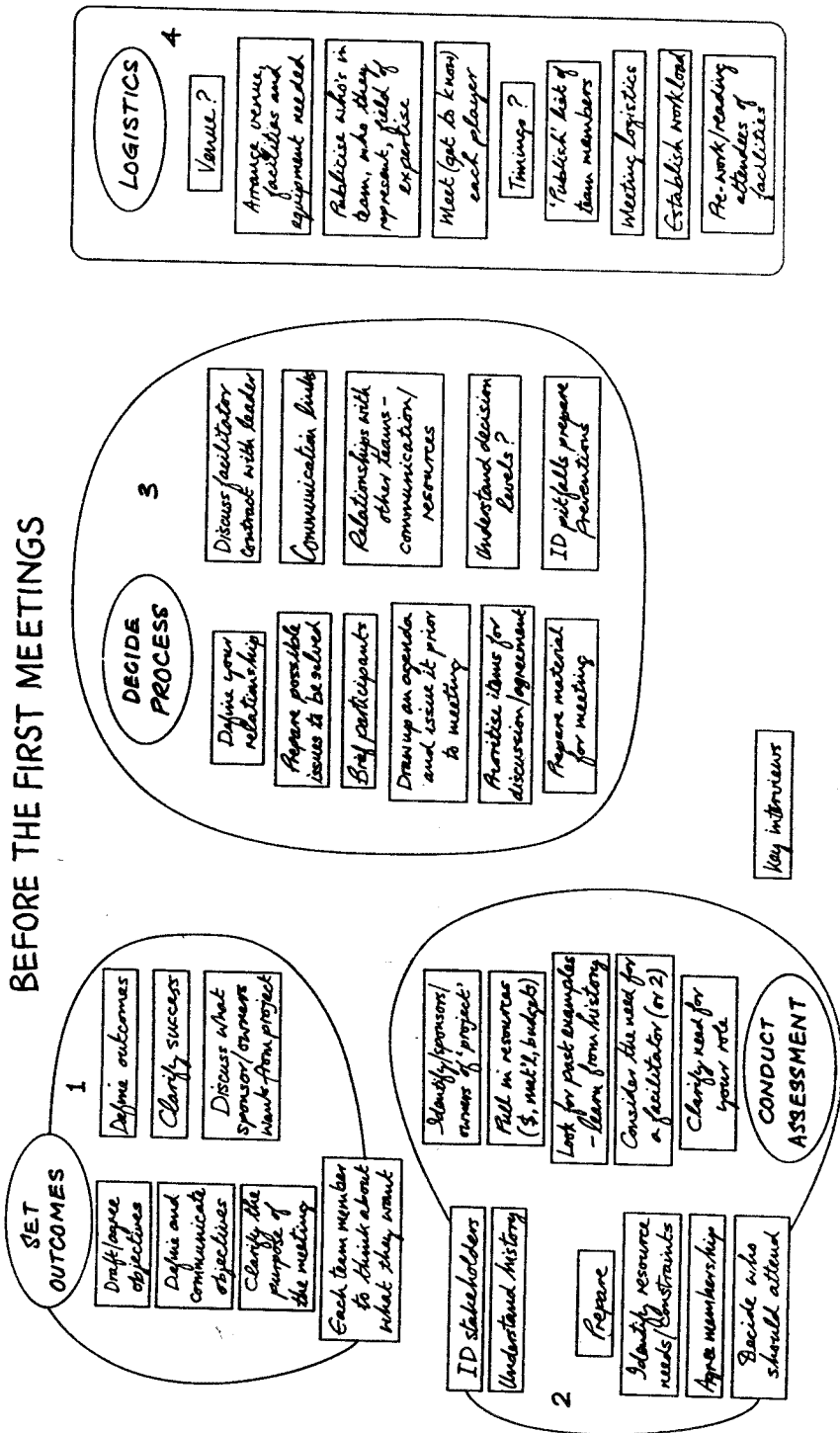


Figure 5.3: Example of Phase 1 on Metaplan Board

It is usually helpful to get each team member to spend some time thinking about stakeholders from their local perspective and to share these with the other team members. This will help to surface any differences about who the team member needs to influence to be successful within their local context. For example, members of international teams who originate from some Asian cultures, may have a complex web of colleagues back in the workplace who would need to be consulted or informed before the team member would feel able to make a decision in the team. If the other team members did not understand this process for getting commitment to a decision, they may impose unrealistically tight timelines for decisions. Getting support for international team decisions locally, is critical if the implementation of those decisions is to be successful.

Once individuals have shared their perceptions of the local stakeholders, a stakeholder map can be constructed for the team. At this point it can be valuable to assess the nature of the relationship with the key stakeholders. For example, who has decision-making authority? Who has key resources within their remit? Who is influential in the wider organisation? With team members with differing language skills, visual tools and techniques to create stakeholder maps are preferable.

Once the stakeholders are identified, the team can assess how effective the existing relationship is with each stakeholder. They can then develop appropriate communication and influencing strategies and prioritise what actions need to be taken to develop the relationships for the future. This information is invaluable when the team begins to map out its Communication Charter.

Establishing working practices

Given the range of perspectives usually present in an international team, gaining early agreement on the way to work is critical. Answers to the following questions need to be thought through and agreed:

- How will we make decisions? What does consensus mean?
- How will we give each other feedback?
- How will we evaluate our performance? What constitutes effective performance?
- How will conflicts be resolved?
- How will we design and conduct our meetings?
- How will we communicate our progress?

As we have kept emphasising, a useful tool for surfacing assumptions about the way individuals prefer to work is to use a cultural value checklist*. We have found it to be very valuable with a wide range of international teams. It draws on the work by Hofstede and Trompenaars**.

* See example in Appendix Two.

** See Appendix One.

Communication Charter for Project Team B

WHO?	TOPIC/ISSUE?	METHOD?	WHEN?
Regulatory	liaise with external regulators re new bill submitted to parliament re conversion	phone and face to face meeting	tomorrow and week next Friday
Clinical	briefing European and Asian colleagues on next actions	focus groups - VC and f to f	before budget submission deadline
Marketing	latest trial data from Japan	written confidential report	before next review
Finance	budget figures for next quarter	fax	tomorrow
Facilitator	design quarterly meeting with sub team Inform team of development opps	video conf and email Bulletin board	by end of month Monthly update
Project Manager	updates to sponsor update wider network	Face to face email	Weekly monthly

Figure 5.5: Communication Charter

with; *when* they need to communicate with them and *how*, ie what communication method is preferable the beginnings of which are shown in the Metaplan (Figure 5.5).

A useful exercise to do as a precursor to drafting the communication charter is to have team members outline their perceptions of the advantages and disadvantages of the different methods of communication (see Figure 5.6 and also Chapter Six).

Phase Three: Mid Point

As noted in Chapter Four, this is the phase where the teams will be focused on achieving the milestones set in the first meetings and much of the work will be done from a distance. However, teams need to stay connected during this phase and as described in Chapter Four, this is when teams will need to work through 'strategic moments'. Facilitators can really add value to the teams at this stage by helping them work through strategic moments, paying attention to the ground rules the team agreed.

During this phase, facilitators can help teams improve their effectiveness by developing their feedback capabilities and by developing the skills they require to complete their tasks successfully.

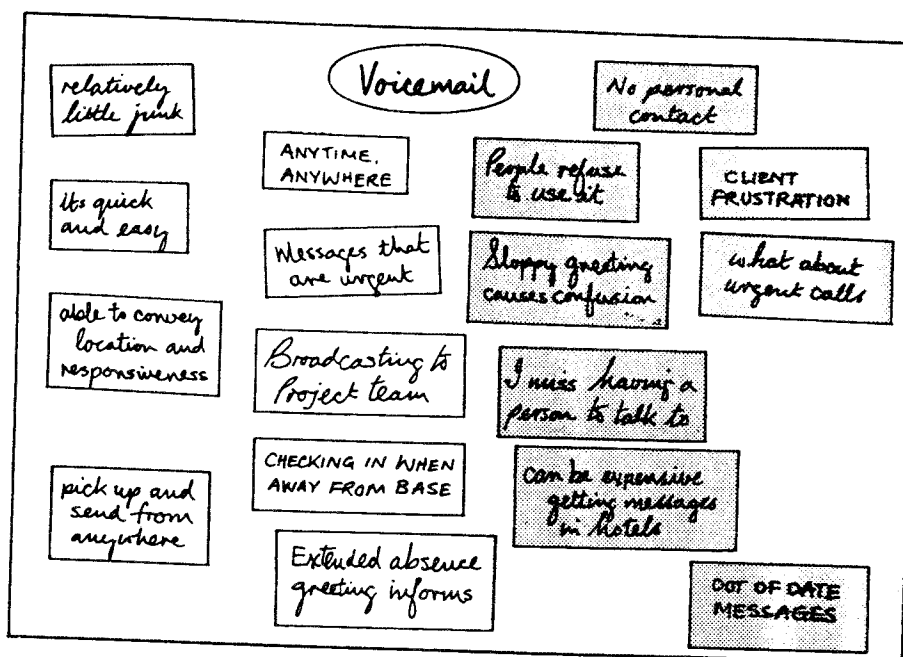


Figure 5.6: Advantages and Disadvantages of communication choices

Develop feedback skills and processes

There are a range of *increasingly in-depth* techniques that can be used to raise the team's awareness about how they are working and provide them with some tools including:

- The facilitator and/or team member observes half an hour of the team's interaction whilst they are working on a task*. They can then feed back the observations to the team and facilitate a discussion about whether the communication patterns they have adopted are useful or if some team members are being excluded or marginalised. A checklist can be used to record the contributions made by each team member. At the simplest level it can be enough to record who spoke, for how long and to whom. When the observers have developed their skills they will be able to consider the nature of the contribution made by each team member – for example, does it build on others contributions? Does it block the conversation? Who is interrupting who? What is their reaction? What is the level of simultaneous talk?
- Designing customised review questionnaires based on the ground rules established by the group**. These can be completed at different stages of

* See form in Appendix Two.

** See Appendix Two.

the team's lifecycle to track how they are performing over time. It can also provide an early warning signal if any member of the team is beginning to feel marginalised.

- Videoing part of the team meeting and then replay the video to the team and ask them to discuss what they observed on the recording. Get them to think about the actual behaviours they observed versus the espoused behaviours they aspire to, as documented in the ground rules.

These three modes of feedback can be done in this order so that the team gets slowly used to increasingly in-depth feedback on their interaction. Most teams are reluctant to start with something as real time and 'exposing' as being filmed on a video camera.

As discussed previously, we advocate providing skills development to international teams 'just in time', eg problem-solving techniques, conflict resolution tools. For example, each time a group has brainstormed and need to prioritise their lists, the facilitator can introduce different techniques for prioritisation. The team should review the pros and cons of each technique as they use it so that they develop their awareness of when to use certain techniques.

This requires the facilitator to have an extensive 'toolkit' available that can be accessed by the group as the need arises. We reiterate again (like a broken record) that care needs to be taken to ensure that the interventions selected by the facilitator are culturally appropriate for the group. Simulations can work effectively with multicultural groups as they enable the behaviour patterns to surface quickly and the learning can be very rich.

Phase Four: Closing Stages

This last section will explore what support facilitators can give to international teams to ensure that this final phase is successful. Chapter Four briefly explored the issue of evaluation and emphasised the importance of reviews once the team's task has come to completion. It is this phase where the facilitator's organisational awareness is important: they can help the team to connect with others in the organisation who could benefit from their learning.

Celebrating what was achieved is an important aspect of maintaining morale and keeping staff excited about continuing to work on international teams. However, given the dynamic nature of the workplace, teams can often be disbanded, reconfigured or refocused before they are officially 'complete'. If the team and the organisation are going to gain maximum benefit, it is important that the team is officially ended and a final review of what has been achieved and learnt is conducted. The facilitator needs to work with the team sponsors and leader to ensure this happens. In too many organisations, effective team leaders are quickly allocated to new teams and time is not built in to reflect on their experience.

A word of warning: the first time a team is asked to conduct a project review that focuses on both the task output and the interactive process, the facilitator may need to provide clear instructions and examples to help start the process.

One team we worked with was given pens and flipcharts and asked to 'draw' their process. Some individuals drew a large round cartoon face with a smile, while others sat with empty pages, staring at the facilitator as if she was mad. For some, there was no concept of the journey that had been taken. The person who had held the team together was the only one to spend a long time drawing a long curving river, with many tributaries flowing in and out of it.

An argument quickly broke out as to whether the task had any meaning or value. Only the river man avidly supported the exercise.

Many people do not have any concepts within which to frame an interactive process. It is something that just happens and you can forget about it once the task is complete.

One successful team leader was asked by another how her team had achieved the tasks set them, the initial reply was 'We got on well and things just fell into place', which did not help the new leader to learn what he could be doing differently. He tried again, 'Yes but what did you do?' to which he got the curt response: 'Worked of course'.

This is where we come back to the importance of using the four phase model with international teams throughout their life cycle. It gives structure to and demonstrates the reality of talking about 'how' you are doing something as well as 'what' you are doing. As Peter Drucker has said, 'what managers do is the same the world over, it is how they do it that is different'. It is this difference we want to capture in these final team reviews.

Evaluation can be usefully viewed through the lenses of the life cycle model. The relevant issues can be evaluated at each stage as well as at the end. One piece of research¹ found that clarity of mission was the only factor that related to research and development project success across all four team stages. Table 5.1 gives a rough guide of what other aspects of the task and interaction need to be assessed at which stages.

Care must be taken to measure what the team agrees is relevant at each stage. International teams obviously have a lot more in-depth work to do in their initial stages than national co-located teams. If they can hardly ever meet, it will take them far longer to get any sense of being interdependent and well co-ordinated as a team, if they ever do. As will be described in Chapter Ten,

Table 5.1: General recommendations that need to be honed to each specific task and situation

Team Phase	Important Activities for Evaluation
Start up phase	<p>The purpose is clear to all involved</p> <p>All involved understand where the team and task fits in corporate strategy</p> <p>Sponsors, team leaders and clients have jointly decided what kind of outcome is wanted and relevant</p> <p>A sense of urgency has been created</p> <p>The necessary personnel, technology and support have been identified and budgeted for.</p>
First meetings	<p>The whole team understands and agrees on the purpose, goals and targets.</p> <p>The whole team understands the roles and responsibilities of each team member</p> <p>The whole team has been involved in generating the widest range of ideas on the task</p> <p>The team has diagnosed its strengths and weaknesses and agreed how to manage its team processes</p> <p>The team has agreed its patterns, timing and modes of communication.</p>
Mid phase	<p>The team is clear about its purpose and has narrowed its options to one path to now achieve its goal</p> <p>The team is carrying out its agreements and maintaining its scheduling</p> <p>The team is ably managing conflicts, inertia, problem solving and decision making</p> <p>The team has accessed and is using all supportive technology</p> <p>The team has kept team sponsors and clients involved and informed.</p>
Completion	<p>The team has successfully completed its task</p> <p>The outcome is effective</p> <p>The team members are satisfied with their performance as a team</p> <p>The team members are clear about how they achieved that performance and have evolved strategies about how to pass on the learning.</p>

evaluating an international team on the same time scales as a less complex entity can be counterproductive. Such teams need to 'start slowly'. Awareness of the timing of evaluation brings home how important it is for teams to have ongoing objective feedback on how well they are performing on the task, as well as how well they are performing as a team during each key stage of its life cycle. A good outcome can radically change a team's perception of its performance as a team, probably more than good team performance can create an effective outcome on the task.

Although an effective team will have been conducting reviews throughout its life cycle, the purpose of the final review is to take a step back and to look at the project in its entirety. It is useful to give team members a couple of weeks away from the team before conducting this final review to enable them to have time

to take stock. Do not leave it too long or they will be sucked into their next task and find it difficult to reconnect.

Get the team members to map the highs and lows throughout the whole life cycle – both for them as individuals and their perception of the team. You can use both formal techniques (reviewing outputs from the team, reviewing communications) to review the deliverables as well as more informal techniques which draw out the richness and less tangible aspects of the experience (drawing, acting, metaphors, telling stories etc). When the process is made conscious from the beginning, the pictures get much more interesting. Unlike the accepted linear pattern of forming, storming, norming and performing, the teams usually draw their processes with large ups and downs, circles and side branches. They often have light bulbs being suddenly switched on or suns emerging when one particular idea or helpful person broke through a thunderously dark cloud and clarified a direction. Rivers, boats, aeroplanes often appear, carrying the teams across the landscape, sea or sky.

Team Review – what worked, what to do differently

Try and make it fun. Some examples you could try with your teams are:

Map the life cycle

You can map out the life cycle of the team once more, as you did in the preliminary meetings and get the team to map out what actually happened in each of the phases. If you have the pictures from the early meetings you can compare and contrast what the team thought would happen and what actually occurred.

Project mural

Prepare some large sheets of paper on a clear wall and along the top mark the timelines of the team. Start with the date the team members were selected and finish with the current date. Ask team members to draw their key moments and achievements that really stand out in their mind. Once everyone has made their contribution, stand back and together interpret the picture you have created.

Project bio-rhythms

This process was developed by an R&D team we were working with. Again map the timeline of the project along the top of the paper and along the side identify all the key stakeholders and participants in the international team. Then for each stakeholder plot their project 'bio-rhythm', ie the highs and lows of the project from their perspective. This process is very useful if you can encourage your key sponsors and stakeholders to participate and plot their own

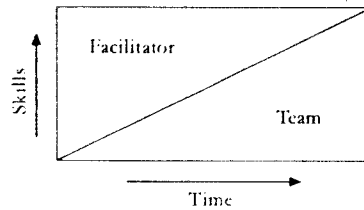


Figure 5.9: Transfer of skills

perspectives. Again once all the perspectives are mapped, stand back and review the story it tells.

This chapter has discussed the role of facilitators in international teams and explored how you can ensure that you are maximising the effectiveness of this role. An effective international facilitator, if used appropriately, can greatly enhance the performance of an international team and embed the learning back into the wider organisation. However, the role of the facilitator is ultimately to transfer all the appropriate skills to the team members, as illustrated by Figure 5.9.

As an organisation develops its ability to select and manage international teams, the reliance on independent facilitators should diminish. Sharing the skills, knowledge and experience necessary to facilitate successful international teams amongst team members is more likely to be sustainable in the long term than trying to develop an elite cadre of 'super' facilitators who are parachuted in whenever a team requires support.

In the early stages of setting up international teams, such a cadre will be invaluable. However, you should take care to staff this cadre with a mix of internal and external facilitators. Not only does this increase the range of skills within the group, but it also means that as the skills are transferred to the team members, you are not in the position of having excess internal resource that requires redeployment.

The tools and techniques outlined in this chapter have been 'low tech'. Our experience with international teams, is that many of them still have not mastered the team basics and 'low tech' interventions are very effective. However, we are living in the midst of a revolution in information technology. One that is having a profound impact on the way international teams can work. Some of the changes and the disciplines these teams need to learn are covered in the next chapter.