Pulling Together In Improvement Teams

What does it mean to develop 'orama' (vision) with regard to working in teams in a greek brewery?

Robert van Noort

Introduction

What now… what do you do if the French managing director of a Greek brewery asks you to help build up and develop teams? How do you ensure that you are able to make use of a method of approach that is used in the Netherlands to deal successfully with a need in Greece? How do you manage to build up a relationship if you will not be at that particular location all that often? What is the right time to ask questions? To what extent will cultural differences form a barrier? Or will these differences be a helpful point of departure? What does it mean to work together speaking in a language which for both parties is still a 'foreign' language? Are these the appropriate questions to ask? In short, more than enough uncertainties to start with.

In this article we explain how we entered the intercultural landscape on the basis of three separate models: (1) a model on cultural characteristics derived from Sherriton and Stern (1997), (2) the communication pyramid (Schein, 1999), and (3) a circle developed by Van Noort for the purpose of arranging change and learning interventions. We start out on our quest by enlarging our cultural awareness assisted by the five steps introduced by Walker (in Nijhof, 1994). The focus in this contribution is on the approach we took and the associated, underlying considerations.

We can even present our main conclusion at this point: bringing up for discussion our uncertainties as to our own behaviour led to a more intensive and deeper relationship with our client. The trust and faith that we thus generated made it possible for us to intervene in such a way that was totally new in Greek brewery culture, and it soon appeared to be extremely effective. On this subject, Schein says that if you are uncertain about your status in a strange environment, you will probably devote more attention to what is happening around you and will be unlikely to intervene all that readily. We subscribe to this statement. Furthermore, when we focused completely on how we were interacting with our surroundings, and gave the uncertainties about our behaviour a place therein, it became easier for us to ask for feedback on our behaviour. Together with the client we looked at the differences and similarities in our approaches without the need for anyone to apologise for his cultural traits.

The request and our interpretation of it

The Amstel Brewery (a division of the Heineken concern) in Thessalonica, Greece, is a very successful company. In order for the brewery to preserve its lead on the competition, the Orama programme was started.

Orama means 'vision'. In this programme the brewery works on the continuous improvement of quality, on achieving a reduction in expenditure and on goal-oriented working in teams. The management team has set a new step by taking three interventions: working in teams (quality circles), the introduction of multi-tasking and the multiskilling, and the empowerment of their employees. The moment we were asked to give our support to this process they wished to stress invest-ments in the learning and change abilities of brewery managers and brewery workers. This is not a question of structural solutions but of making the best possible use of talent. This specific focus on exploring talent and pulling together in teams had previously led to interesting results at Heineken's international head office. Assigned by Heineken University we made a contribution to the changes that were taking place in the teamwork at corporate office. Specialists in the organisation were given the task of facilitator in multi-disciplinary project teams. These facilitators gave sup-port and encouraged the project teams in solving stra-tegic issues, among other things by focusing on teamwork between the various disciplines, establishing results, and by choosing the most effective procedures. In doing so they tended to loose sight of their brewery expertise, focusing mainly on the process of pulling together as a team. The way in which we enticed these specialists to assume this role, and the learning pro-gramme we developed in concert with them, were both effective and innovative for Heineken. The intention is now to experiment with the 'Amsterdam' concept in a Greek brewery.

Opportunities are also seen in Thessalonica of work-ing with facilitators and teams in order to ensure that specialists, managers and (production) personnel are more able to pull together as a team. Out Greek client has expressed the wish for the team managers to be the facilitators of a production or change team.

The intercultural landscape

It is essential that we fully understand the intercultur-al aspects of this project. The following questions run through the entire project in this respect:
- On which values and principles do we base our work on diversity in an international assignment?
- Which cultural aspects can be influential?
- What are the specific characteristics of interaction in the brewery?
- What advice method is the most appropriate one for this particular situation?

Considering the fact that we will be conducting our assignment in a business that belongs to an interna-tional concern we choose to prepare ourselves with

literature that uses 'culture in organisations' as the point of departure. However, we start to answer the first question by using relevant literature on 'diversity management'.

Valuing diversity

In order to make it quite clear for ourselves which val-ues and principles we are working on in an international context, we first set out in our search for appropriate literature which would be able to provide us with a framework to work in.

Nijhof (1994) introduces an interesting model by Walker (1991) which she describes in an ASTD publi-cation. Walker uses several principles which we too used in the Greek brewery. The term 'valuing diversi-ty', which we have translated as 'attributing a value to the aspect of diversity' – fully aware that we are de-meaning the value of English usage – she says has two perspectives:
- working on personal growth and development;
- contributing towards an organisation's growth in terms of productivity.

These two perspectives, which can also be referred to as values, can have conflicting interests. After all, in the sense of 'attributing a value to the aspect of diversity' they should have a binding effect. Terms such as 'the equality of personal interests and organisational inter-ests', 'creativity' and 'innovation' are by definition at

Many cultural change projects fail simply because of the top-down imposition of formal rules

loggerheads with being subordinate to the business culture or the company's interests. We subscribe to this philosophy: we believe that it is the people themselves that shape and form a business culture, and that they are also able to ensure that it evolves in the right direc-tion, supporting the organisation's interests. Many cul-tural change projects are doomed to fail simply because this idea was ruled out. The top-down imposition of informal rules, the assumption of presumed homoge-neity of the employee in a change of culture has in the past led to suppressed resistance and opposition (Schein, 2001). There are four principles as the basis of Walker's attitude towards 'attributing a value to the aspect of diversity':
- people perform best if they feel they are valued;
- people feel valued if they matter, as an individual and as a member of a group;
- a person that has the ability to learn from others holds the key to self-development;

- if a person feels valued and is able to develop himself, then he is also capable of building up relationships in which he is able to collaborate interdependently with others to reach a communal result.

In order to give shape and form to 'attributing a value to the aspect of diversity' Walker distinguishes five steps. We followed these steps explicitly when preparing and executing this assignment. We shall describe these steps and illustrate them with our experiences.

Step 1. Breaking down stereotypes and prejudices. One of the first aspects we brought up for discussion was the comment that 'what works in the Netherlands need not necessarily work in Greece'. And also the remark: 'What they think up at corporate office usually definitely does not apply in our case' is another such preconceived notion. Our answer here was characterised by three levels of intervention:

1. We summarise our feelings (reflections) by saying for example: "In actual fact what you are concerned with here is that we are copying the method we use in the Netherlands to solve your problem here. Is that correct?"
2. Depending on the answer, we then make a procedural comment such as: "We believe it is advantageous for us to take a look together into those elements that you feel are important and at what elements we might be able to add from the Dutch context."
3. We then make a comment which is relevant to the specific situation in Greece, such as: "The situation at your end is different. The main aspect at Thessalonica is that – as facilitators – managers are better able to ensure that teams work together much better; in the Dutch situation it was more a case of specialists being given that new role." We then ask: "What do you think?"

We take this preconception seriously by going into the underlying feelings. Prejudices are often based on anxieties. They tned to block personal development. By entering into a dialogue in this way we also offer a way out, and therefore the person that made the initial remark then has the opportunity to side in with the group as a whole.

Step 2. Learning to listen to and examine the differences in people's assumptions. We note that these discussions are extremely useful for teamwork. The facilitators are of the same mind too. We jointly detect– because of the intercultural setting we work in – that we devote a great deal more attention to suppositions. They too feel that they must look specifically into these subjects within their own teams. After all, these are very important conditions for teamwork. Ultimately, we agree to

return to these subjects on a regular basis in the separate modules of the learning programme.

As we already illustrated in the first example, summarising one's inner feelings is an important step in being able to listen and to establish real contact. It is also a basic condition for step 3, which is concerned with building up authentic relationships.

Step 3. Building up authentic and constructive relationships with people regarded as being 'different'. It is quite possible that we see Greek people as being different from us, and that they too see us as differeing from them. We are aware of the need for a real relationship. We want to get to know these people better, not only in order to see that the assignment is a success, but also because our driving force is to make a contribution towards their personal development. The Greeks have taught us to take our time in building up relationships. We are starting to adopt their pace and to accompany them on their visits into town; to enjoy a meal together and to go shopping, and also to visit places of interest or to explore the nightlife in small groups. The aspects of (over)politeness soon fade into the background and the somewhat weightier subjects such as politics and the economy come to the fore. Discussions of a more personal nature are now also possible.

Step 4. Promoting self-development. Walker assumes respect for the singularity of the individual. In general, an individual comes out the best in smaller groups. When setting up our interventions we consequently make sure that our groups consist of no more than ten people. We devote a great deal of attention to the participants' individual learning programme. It is our intention to mould the entire learning programme on the basis of a match between the wishes of the brewery and the individual wishes of the participating facilitators.

By working in this way we are able to offer individual coaching, collective learning activities for the group as a whole, and joint learning activities on the work floor.

Step 5. Exploring and recognising group differences. There is an enormous risk in this intercultural context of dealing with our participants as a Greek group. We discuss what the major characteristics of our teamwork will be as well as what our customs and habits are. We also explain explicitly that a number of cultural characteristics must be seen as totally separate from the singularity of each individual in the group. We ask our Greek participants to see us in the same light. We too differ as individuals, each having his own style and needs in the way we work together.

These five steps and their specific structure help us to become aware of our cultural and individual singularity. This makes it easier for us to deal with the singularity of our participants, both as members of the group as a whole and in our individual contacts.

Cultural characteristics

To explain the cultural characteristics of importance for this project we made use of the four aspects of culture derived from Sherriton and Stern:

1. rituals and traditions;
2. styles of management; philosophy and behaviour;
3. organisational structure and organisational procedures;
4. written and unwritten rules.

We shall describe this model first before moving on to explain how we have applied it.

It is our specific intention to be sure that we are dealing consciously with the similarities and differences between our cultures. We feel that by doing this we are strengthening our collaboration with the client.

Sherriton and Stern give four reasons why we often neglect cultural aspects. The first being that that culture is so deeply instilled that we often simply completely forget to think about it. The second reason they put forward is that it is difficult to formulate common characteristics because many people of our own culture, for example, feel that the different dimensions of their own culture are important. We only recognise cultural characteristics when we detect changes or differences from what we are accustomed to. We assume – quite subconsciously – that other people have the same customs. This is the third reason. The final reason is that many people think that our roots are so old that many aspects thereof are simply a matter of fact and cannot be changed. These are consequently appropriate warning signals for us. Walker suggested it already: we must use our ears and eyes well, and constantly account for and verify our own convictions.

Consequently, we entered into discussion beforehand with Heineken employees in the Netherlands – and others – who had previously spent time working in Greece, Dutch people working for the Greek Amstel organisation and with the Thessalonica brewery's Greek employees. We have attempted to incorporate their comments in the four cultural aspects. During our initial visit to the brewery we obtained more information and bundled it together in an overview.

We first give a brief description of the cultural characteristics in four categories.

1. *Rituals or traditions.* Every company, every country, and all peoples develop and nurture them. They are often patterns of norms and values that have emerged over the course of time: "That's the way we do it". In the Netherlands we often see in many consultancy firms the informal Friday phenomenon: no suit and tie in the office, but a more casual outfit (and this is often according to precise standards of what is allowed and what not).

2. *Style of management, philosophy and behaviour.* This relates to the question: 'What are the underlying convictions, norms and values that direct the manager's behaviour? If a manager is more likely to reward individual achievements as opposed to team achievements, people will stop taking up their positions as team players. An inconsistent line of behaviour of the managers with the responsibility for taking decisions gives rise to uncertainty and ostrich policy.

3. *Organisational environment and organisational procedures.* The organisational context has a major influence on culture. Policy, systems and procedures support the company's interests and priorities. We give a number of examples of questions we can ask on this aspect of culture. What is the policy on personnel? How is performance measured? What system of remuneration does the company follow? What are the rules concerning overtime? What does the building look like, are the premises neat and tidy?

4. *Written and unwritten rules.* Every organisation has both written and unwritten rules. These are concerned with what kind of behaviour is and is not accepted. In some businesses we see that virtually everyone is present before eight o'clock in the morning. A few people are still to be found in the office after five in the afternoon. Is there a lunchtime culture or does everyone eat their sandwiches at their desk? Is it a question of 'Chris' or 'Mr Miles'?

The overview given in Figure 1 shows examples of the cultural characteristics seen in breweries.

This arrangement helps us to understand the specific cultural characteristics. Even though we do not speak one another's language, we do take the explicit trouble to understand the way we react to one another. A good example of resolving a misunderstanding is explained below.
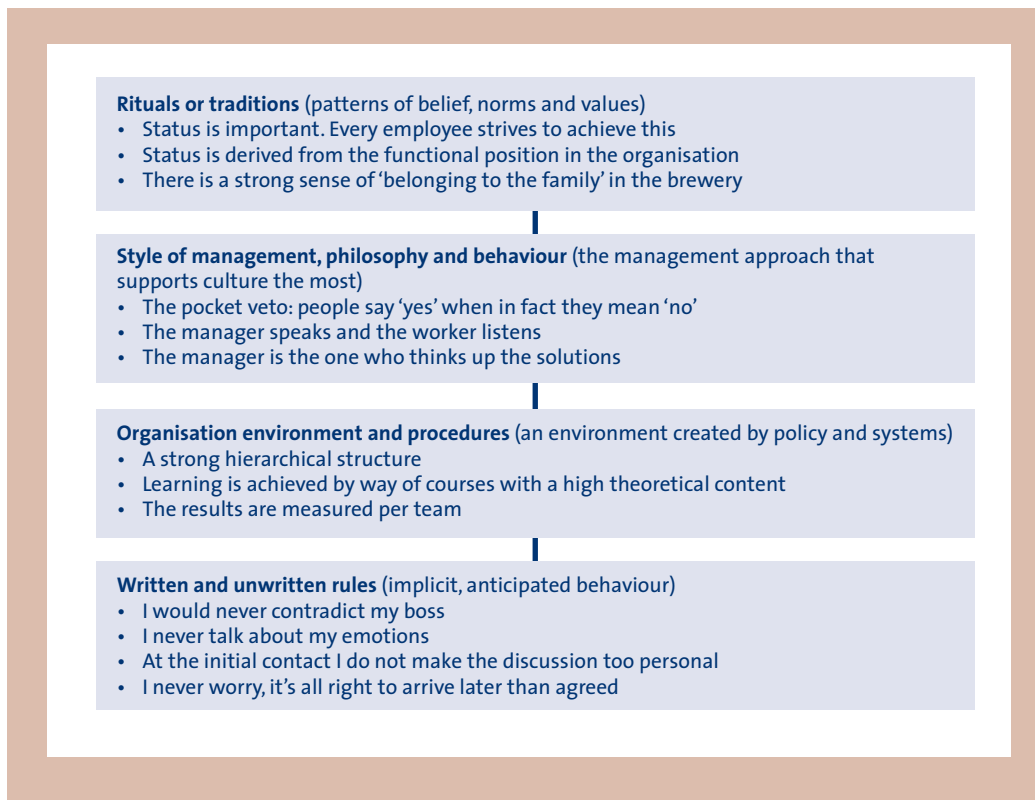
Rituals or traditions (patterns of belief, norms and values)
- Status is important. Every employee strives to achieve this
- Status is derived from the functional position in the organisation
- There is a strong sense of 'belonging to the family' in the brewery

Style of management, philosophy and behaviour (the management approach that supports culture the most)
- The pocket veto: people say 'yes' when in fact they mean 'no'
- The manager speaks and the worker listens
- The manager is the one who thinks up the solutions

Organisation environment and procedures (an environment created by policy and systems)
- A strong hierarchical structure
- Learning is achieved by way of courses with a high theoretical content
- The results are measured per team

Written and unwritten rules (implicit, anticipated behaviour)
- I would never contradict my boss
- I never talk about my emotions
- At the initial contact I do not make the discussion too personal
- I never worry, it's all right to arrive later than agreed

Figure 1. Examples of cultural characteristics in breweries

Example

Here we discuss the 'pocket veto' phenomenon (Hanson, 1996): saying 'yes' when in actual fact we mean 'no'. At a workshop Robert discusses a model on project management with the group of facilitators. He then gives an assignment for them to work out and asks whether they have understood it. The participants give a friendly nod. When they subsequently set to work on the assignment it becomes apparent that they have not fully understood. Instead of explaining again, Robert chooses to intervene in the process. He expresses his suspicion that the participants said 'yes' because they are accustomed to saying yes to their boss or trainer. After some hesitation a few participants confirm that what he said was correct. Robert summarises those feelings he suspects have an obstructing effect. Several participants then admit that they feel uncertain in terms of their skills in speaking in English. Robert then discusses with the group how they would like to deal with this aspect. Apart from the fact that not everyone is able to understand what the exact intention is, it is apparent that some of them are not in agreement with the assignment. They have a better idea. During this discussion, the participants themselves indicate how they would like to continue. They themselves formulate an assignment and suggest to pause now and again to explain in Greek what has been discussed and to answer any queries ▲

► people might have. The participants also come to the conclusion that the pocket veto is a frequent element in the brewery. They see the opportunity to tackle this phenomenon in the brewery in their role as facilitators.

Interaction characteristics

During the preliminary study – part of which is done in the brewery itself – we soon find that we are expected to express a positive judgement as to how the brewery has acted up to now. Critical questions or reactions are apparently not welcome. We detect this, among other things, from the proud way in which they make their presentations, using large numbers of well designed overhead sheets, formal auditorium arrangements, and also from the way our questions are avoided. Only at dinner do we find time for the real questions. This experience brings us up with the idea of drawing a distinction in the level of communication according to Schein. What are the specific characteristics of interaction in the brewery? The answer to this question can help to detect the most appropriate ideas for building up a solid relationship. The pyramid in Figure 2 shows the three levels of interaction: content, procedure and process.

Our method of approach on giving advice

The way we give our advice is based on the ideas in the 'relational approach' (Kessels, 1994). This approach focuses *inter alia* on involving the actors in the process of thinking and development. The goal is that not only the consultants evolve and express their own views on what they feel is the best method, but especially those persons in the organisation that are involved. The effect of working in this way is that those persons involved mould the solutions themselves, and there is then a high chance that these solutions can indeed be realised. Moreover, it stimulates the ability to resolve problems in the organisation itself. In fact in this method of approach we see several aspects from Walker's steps, the cultural characteristics presented by Sherriton and Stern, as well as specific forms of interaction derived from Schein. Once the mutual views have been explic-

itly formulated they can then start to exist, be discussed and, if necessary, adjusted. The characteristics of our method of approach on giving advice are:

– *Reflecting on one's own behaviour.* We are always constantly taking a critical look back at our own behaviour and the potential effect it has on our interlocutors.
– *Making cultural differences a subject of discussion.* Whenever differences in culture crop up which are new to us or which have a specific effect on the way we work together, we bring them up for discussion. The pleasing aspect here is that people then stop hiding behind the cultural differences but start to show pleasure in looking into them.
– *Naming the objective of the activity.* We always talk about the actual objective or the intention of each interactive activity. By doing this we test our expectations and ideas against those of our interlocutors.
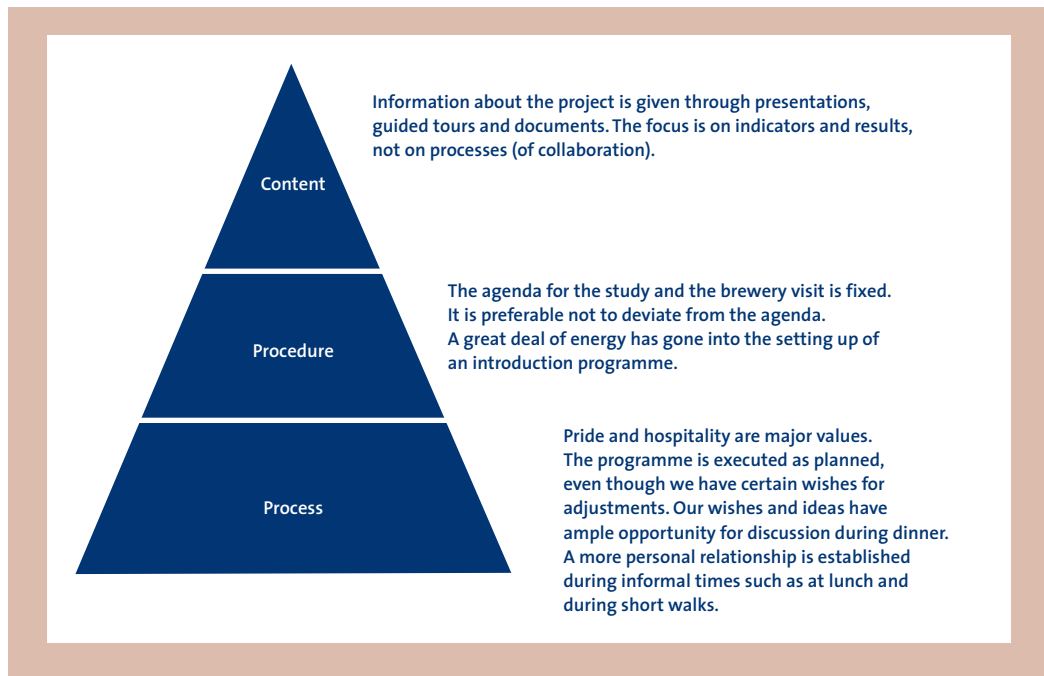

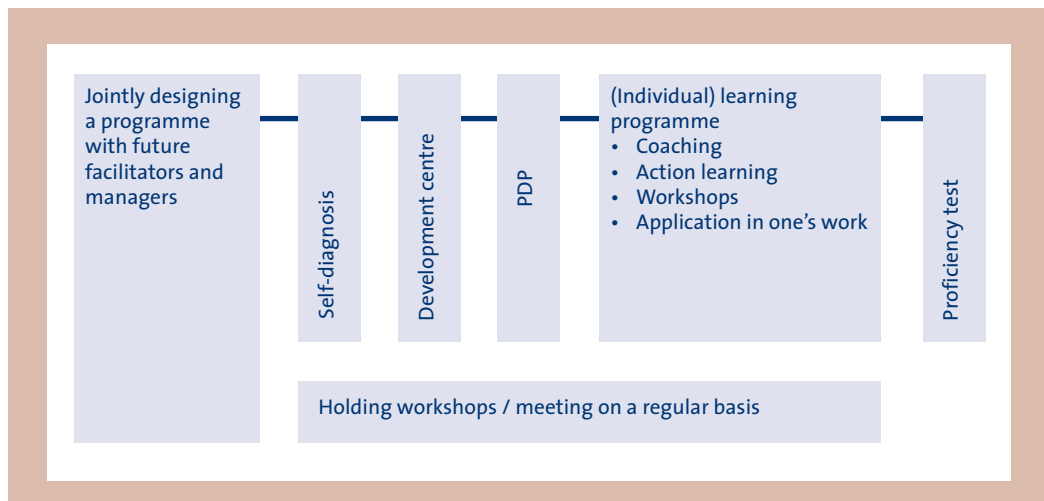*Figure 2. An analytical example of interaction during the initial visit to the brewery*

Figure 3. Diagram showing the interventions

– *Explaining how we experience the relationship.* We discuss our own thoughts about the relationship. This explanation makes it much easier to achieve an exchange on the actual characteristics of our relationship.
– *Inviting the other party to help think along with us.* We invite our interlocutors to help think about the targets, the form and the content. The objective here is to reach a jointly developed programme.

We use the information about the cultural characteristics and methods of intervention chiefly for the purpose of adapting our behaviour and our interventions in our interactions. The structure of each sort of intervention used in the Amsterdam situation apparently also work in the international context.

Which interventions did we use?

'Learning to change'

Learning to change is the title of the Thessalonica project. Pulling together in teams can be greatly improved by using facilitators. The goal of this project is to upgrade several managers to the position of facilitators. The main element of this is to explore their talents. We develop the learning programme itself in close cooperation with these facilitators and their superiors, and jointly analyse the skills a facilitator needs in the brewery.

To give an idea as to which interventions we made we shall now give a short summary of the essence of each intervention. We also briefly set out the experiences we gained. We have described the interventions in the same order they were made. The diagram shown in Figure 2 outlines the main lines of the chronology. We then introduce an arrangement of the interventions, not in chronological order but which does give an overview of the cohesion between the various interventions.

On the basis of the information we gathered, we then organised a development centre (see the section at the end of this contribution), developed a learning programme and drew up a structure for a proficiency test.

Designing in concert

One of the brewery's senior managers comes to Amsterdam. Using the questions we drew up together, he subsequently carries out a part of the preliminary study. Among other things he formulates critical incidents, interviews major players in the brewery and asks them for their ideas as to the competencies required for a facilitator. Using these data we then draw up a variety of practical situations for the development centre which are essential for a facilitator in the brewery at Thessalonica. We first of all ask for any suggestions for learning targets and look into the optional subjects for the learning programme.

Self-diagnosis

While in itself this is an exciting component, discussing together in advance which competencies and behavioural criteria are included in the list of reflections is also quite exceptional. The brewery managers thus have the feeling that the product is becoming more their own. It is the intention that the future facilitator completes such a list. He also asks one of his co-workers or his superior to fill in a list on his behalf. They then discuss this further. This is a very important step for taking part in the whole programme.

Development centre

We go to spend a week in Thessalonica where we organise an informative meeting for all concerned: the board of directors, the managers that take part to become a facilitator, colleagues who are developers (assessors), the Dutch actor and consultants and a Greek consultant. The Greek consultant is a developer at the 'situation' where self-reflection is dealt with extensively. This subject is very personal; we therefore choose to conduct this situation entirely in Greek.

Working with actors in roll playing or in imitated situations taken from practice is completely unheard of in Greece. Working with an actor, especially an actor from the Netherlands, is something quite unique. However, the situations are taken entirely from the brewery situation and this makes it very realistic for the participants.

We start to work with the developers from the brewery. These are co-managers or trainers from the brewery who speak good English. We prepare them for their role in the development centre. The developers fulfil an important role in observing and assisting the participants, They are able to translate any instructions in Greek if necessary. It is evident that they have an enormous value for the success of the development centre. They too are given the opportunity to express their learning aspirations, for instance: becoming more skilled in giving feedback. This results in an atmosphere at the development centre in which developers and facilitators are able to experiment with no risks attached. The fact that these colleagues are present while they are practicing is now seen as an advantage instead of a drawback. The developers become interested colleagues later on in the learning programme. Moreover, this group of developers also fulfil a role in the proficiency test.

Personal development plan

The facilitators draw up a personal development plan (PDP) in which they incorporate the feedback from the development centre, combined with their own learning aspirations and translate them into learning activities. The PDP – together with the brewery management's fixed goals – subsequently becomes input for the learning programme. The facilitators discuss their PDPs with their immediate supervisors. This evidently is not entirely problem free. Many managerial staff subscribe to the idea of facilitation: pleasant and useful, but preferably in the training course. While we think we have done a great deal in the implementation it turned out to be disappointing. We decide to stimulate involvement even further by organising separate meetings for the facilitators' supervisors and the brewery's directors.

It is our intention to supervise the facilitators from a distance and to organise individual coaching sessions when we are in Thessalonica. We would preferably like to offer more intensive coaching but unfortunately time is not exactly on our side. We also have little experience with distance coaching. In practice therefore we tend to supervise on site.

Learning programme

Together with the participants we set out the contours of the learning programme on the basis of the outcomes of the development centre. We fly out to Greece about once every two months for almost a year to

The learning programme is designed on the basis of the outcomes of the development centre

supervise a module. These modules are built up mainly of exercises that can be brought into practice immediately on the basis of reflecting on the work carried out previously. Reflection take place both within the group and individually with one of the Dutch consultants. In the mean time the participants work in their teams on their facilitator skills. To this end we devise specific exercises.

The fact that in the meantime work is carried out on assignments is new for the participants. The first time we return to Greece we see that only one of the facilitators has worked on the assignment. The most important reason the others give is the lack of support from their supervisors; yet another reason for organising additional activities for this group. The learning programme itself consists of different modules.

Workshops for managerial staff and the directorate

Together with the participants we organise a short workshop per module in which the managerial staff also become involved in the module highlights. We then go into town with the whole group to eat. This formula is a success. They too are given assignments to assist their facilitators in their daily work. Later on, the facilitators take over these short workshops from us completely. They start to practice the most important facilitator skills on their own supervisors. Moreover, they start to engage in discussion with one another in a different, more equal fashion. In the periods between the modules the majority of the managerial staff start to show more involvement in the learning programme and bring the theory into practice.

Proficiency test

The facilitators complete the formal learning programme. In individual sessions we draw up a list with one another as to what they have learnt and what effect this has had on the quality of how they function in the brewery. We run through a situation again from the development centre and then discuss the progress that has been made. Additionally, many of the developers are accompanied by a team member who tells of his or her experiences with the facilitator. The brewery developers also join in and give feedback.

During the proficiency test one of the brewery developers says to the facilitator that although she feels she has learnt a great deal, it is hardly noticeable in their day-to-day working together: the facilitator is then a conceited man who only finds it inconvenient to have to work together with someone else. At first the facilitator is shocked at the remark but still acknowledges the feedback. During this proficiency test, they have worked together with one of our consultants on a plan to achieve better collaboration. After the session had finished the developer told us that she had overcome a major obstacle for herself: she had given feedback to a male colleague in a higher position, She was very pleased with herself in this respect and was looking forward to renewing her teamwork with this facilitator.

Arranging three learning interventions in three separate segments

It is our hope to be able to integrate the aspect of learning as much as possible into one's daily work. Attention given to three types of interventions promotes this idea (see Van Noort's classification circle in Figure 4):
1. the conditions for learning;
2. the influence of others in the work environment (and occasionally outside that environment);
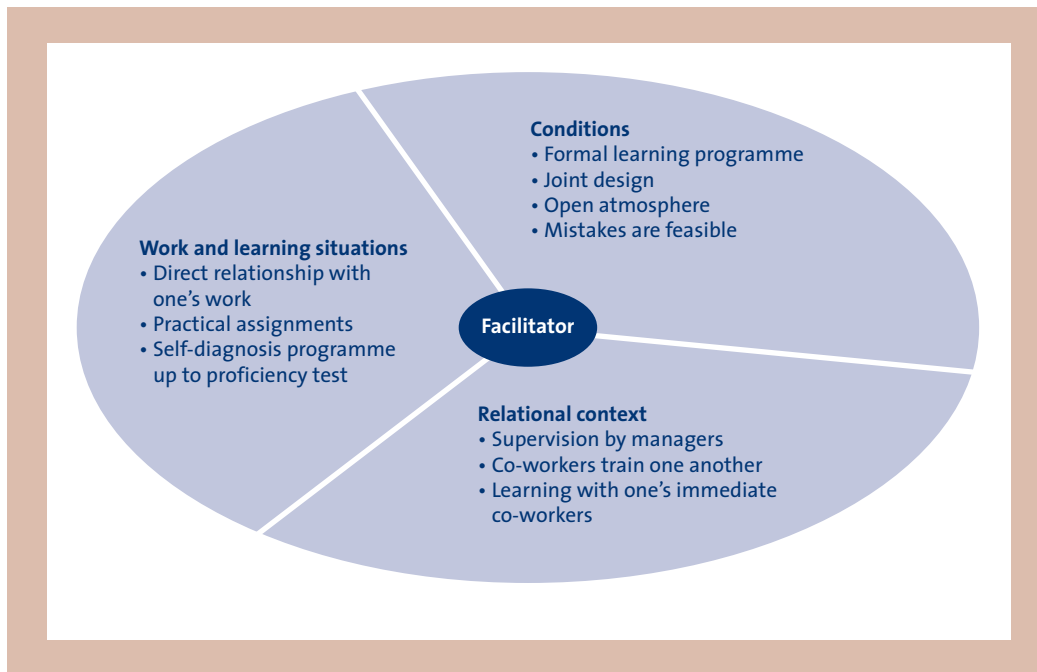3. 'arranging' the working and learning situation.

Figure 4. Classification circle for change and learning interventions

Rituals and traditions
– Pulling together leads to better results. All managers strive to achieve this
– Status is derived from the way in which you all pull together
– There is still a strong feeling of 'belonging to the family' in the brewery
– Going out in search of talent in another department is now an option

Style of management, philosophy and behaviour
– The manager listens and asks questions; the worker speaks
– The manager asks for solutions
– The manager asks his colleagues for advice and even for assistance
– The facilitators train their co-managers to facilitator

Organisation environment and procedures
– In addition to penalties and awards, employees are given feedback on the basis of effects
– Team learning is cautiously introduced into the teams
– The results are measured per team and subsequently related to the brewery results

Written and unwritten rules
– I ask my boss questions and occasionally put forward alternative suggestions as to how things could be done differently
– I talk about my emotions, but not too often
– At the initial contact I do not make the discussion too personal
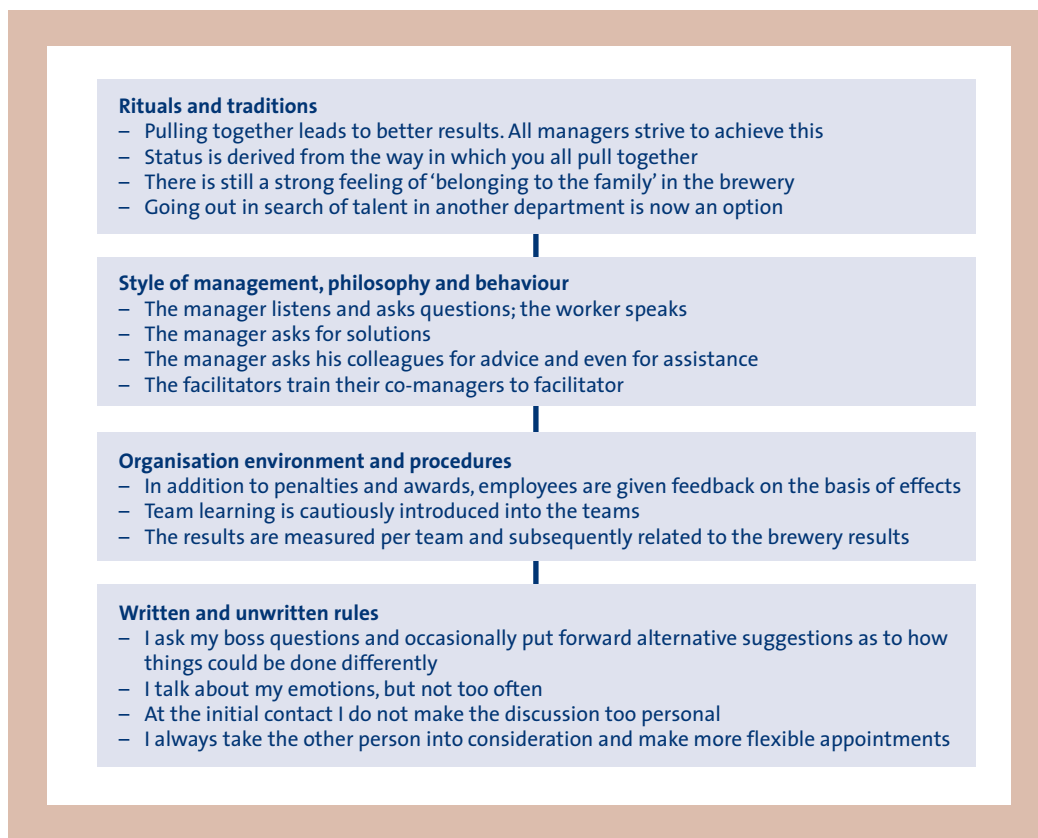– I always take the other person into consideration and make more flexible appointments

Figure 5.

We use a 'classification circle' to obtain an overview of the three intervention perspectives. This classification helps us to obtain a view of the cohesion between the various interventions. The circle is easy to understand and gives the participants and other persons involved an insight into the perspectives described.

Examples of interventions that deal with the creation of favourable conditions for learning are: offering a formal learning programme for a specific period of time and fixed feedback times, creating an open atmosphere allowing for practice and experimenta-

tion, and the building up of a continuous relationship with one's daily duties in all formal activities.

The second type of intervention focuses on the influence other people have while the facilitator is learning. To create a relational context that stimulates learning, we train for instance the management team in the supervision of facilitators. Brewery trainers also participated actively, both as participants in the learning programme and in the role of facilitator supervisor.

Each facilitator has his own team during the learning programme. He works on the practical assignments together with his team members. This environment allows him to practice his newly acquired skills and also to experiment with new work situations for example. This third intervention type supports the actual structuring of the work situation and the learning situation.

What is the effect of the learning and change programme?

When implemented, change and learning interventions not only lead to the participants being able to work as facilitators in a team and being able to make better use of their talents. An equally important goal is that they bring about changes in the organisation that contribute towards the brewery's needs to keep ahead of its competitors. Several effects in the organisation are:

- The managers act less 'hierarchical': a relationship arises which is geared more towards learning, coaching between manager and worker. There is also a sense of shared responsibility between them.
- Working together in the teams is more effective. This can be seen in the results and in the time required for projects. People tend to approach one another more for their talents and expertise rather than from a sense of 'being family'.
- There is a stronger sense of collegiality among the supervisors themselves; work is based on team spirit.

We can illustrate a number of these effects in the model introduced by Sherriton and Stern (see Figure 5)

The top three tips

The three 'rules' set out below were the best in helping us to be effective in this assignment:

- Starting on day one, look for the different cultural characteristics, make them explicit and search together for the most appropriate way to deal with them. Take the lead in this respect at all times.
- Jointly give shape and form to the intended method of approach.

- Be aware of your insecurity; this makes it easier for you to use your sensitivity better and above all: be patient.

In conclusion

Have we now introduced a Dutch method of approach in the Greek culture? The procedure we followed was also new in the Dutch context. The emphasis was placed on the *corporate culture*. In the Greek context the emphasis was on the culture between the two nations. Bringing about change implies by definition giving attention to the effects on culture. Even more so, by focusing from the very start on the cultural aspects of the assignment we were able to work on the assignment relatively successfully. Collaboration with our client partly allowed us to experience ourselves what it is like to work together in a brewery. By bringing many of our experiences regarding our work together up for discussion, we were able to gain insight into the patterns of interaction in the brewery. For the client, this was an additional benefit: explicit knowledge about the interaction and the cultural aspects of pulling together as a team. Whether this is a Dutch method of approach or not, it was a method that worked well.

What is a development centre?

Smit and Van Noort (1996) gave an extensive description of a development centre, how to design and use a development centre.

A development centre is an instrument for gaining insight into the strengths and weaknesses in the qualifications of people, with the intention of improving their performance within the organisation (Mumford, 1993). Development centres offer help in diagnosing and monitoring the performance of employees in organisations and give feedback information to benefit their development process. They provide information about the participant's proficiency and learning abilities in connection with the competencies of relevance to a job, role or task. A development centre is therefore not intended as a selection instrument for assessing the candidate's suitability for a specific job.

Organisations thrive on feedback (Senge, 1990) and the people in organisations benefit from feedback. Questions such as 'How am I performing?', 'What are my strong and weak points?', 'What can I do better or differently?', 'Where are my limits?' are expressions of the need for information as to one's performance. Development centres connect assessment with development and training with the intention of bringing about a change in behaviour in a certain direction. Development centres differ in this respect from other ▲

► personal feedback and benchmarking instruments: feedback on performance is coupled directly to help in behavioural change.

One important principle is that the participants map out their own learning programme on the basis of advice and the insights they themselves have obtained on the new skills they wish to develop. One's own responsibility for learning is absolutely essential.

Management's commitment is also crucial in this respect; they usually have a large share in the development of their employees. They are often able to forecast the career ahead of an employee. They are experienced in learning processes and have experience of the careers of many members of their staff. Decisions and prognoses are to a large extent based on non-explicit knowledge. These people have a wealth of (unspecifiable) empirical knowledge or *tacit knowledge* of the possibilities of the success and failure of an employee in a future task or job. The manager, and sometimes the internal trainer or co-worker as well, are invited by the development centre to make the most possible use as a developer (observer) of their non-explicit knowledge on the learning abilities, the new task and the participant, respectively.

The characteristics of a development centre are:
- *Substantial responsibility of the participant*. The employee decides himself whether he wishes to work with the development centre and is also co-responsible for his own development.
- *No secrecy*. The participant is given information in advance about the criteria for the job / role and about the state of affairs at the development centre. Feedback is given to the participants during the entire development centre; this provides the participant with a clearer picture as to the opportunities open to him.
- *Domain specific*. Development centres are based on concrete work situations. Use is made of (imitated) practical situations from the intended position in order to gain an insight into the skills and learning abilities of the participant. The benefit here is that the development centre has an immediate insight into a how a person is performing in tasks that are (or will be) demanded of him. Another advantage is that the relevance of the exercise tends to motivate and stimulate the participants.
- *Orientation towards the learning yield*. The development centre is not only a diagnostic instrument. The preparation of and the feedback given during the development centre period lead to a substantial learning result for all participants.
- *Contribution towards the development of a learning organisation*. A development centre stimulates a ▲

► climate in which making mistakes is quite permissible, and in which it is possible to experiment and to learn.

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