

INCIDENT NO 1.

THEME: Diverse Organizational Backgrounds

This incident occurred during a Leonardo pilot project looking at the language course provision for migrant workers. Six partners were involved and a silent partner. It was a 3 year project.

Questions for Reflection

At what stage in the project did it occur?

The event happened after one year, the third meeting. As a result, one partner left because there was no clear agreement about the aim of project.

What happened?

There was a big compromise in the early stages of the project to keep together lots of different kinds of organisations. One partner worked in non-formal education, some worked in very large organisations some in small ones. These partners were interested in working with migrant people, in a general way, looking at intercultural themes.

In the preparatory meeting there was a big compromise to put things into the project. One partner wanted a very specific approach, the other a more fluid and general approach. We had a nice kick-off meeting and the second meeting was very effective but then when we came to the third one the project started to become very concrete.

One of the partners was very strict and did not want a wider remit. Another wanted emphasis on language learning. There were big arguments in the meeting. It was very uncomfortable for people. Eventually one of the partners left.

The partner left because it was difficult to do what they proposed. There were too many differences between the partner organisations – some were big some small, some formal some informal. One manager could make decisions on the wing, another couldn't and was answerable to his boss for any changes to the approach. It had to be very much part of the larger organisational plan

Who was involved?

Everyone witnessed the problem but it was around personal conflict between the two partners. Other partners tried to mediate. In the end, I don't think the project was an important part of the larger plan for one of the partners and they left. Smaller organisations have more ability to change.

Where did it occur?

It happened at the third meeting. At the first meetings people were trying to understand each other and present their organisations in a positive way and be very careful. It was at the point where we had to do actual planning of activities that the problem arose.

Analysing the incident

What were the main challenges/conflicts?

There were several challenges –

- Importance of project to organisation
- status of individuals attending the meeting
- working styles of organisations.

What happened as a result?

One partner left the project

Looking back on the situation, would you do anything differently?

I was in the middle. It was very difficult. We were closer in style to the small organisation. We decided to stay in the partnership and I'm glad we stayed. I regret not having been able to mediate more. The project coordinator did not take a clear position about this.

What would you advise other people to do to avoid this situation occurring/ or if this situation occurred again?

First of all I think that there should be much more attention paid to the partnership. All the partners were very skilled and qualified, it was not about the quality of partners. Projects must not go on working without a clear idea of direction. You must always take time to put the partnership before the project. It is not easy to put work in before the first meeting to get this sorted out. I advise that you should stop and take time, not to hide the problem but focus on it. Training in these skills would be good.

From your point of view, did the situation reveal any cultural dimension?

I think it was not so much about national cultural differences, but more about organisational culture. One partner was from a national institution, public body the other from a small local one.

Did the situation challenge any preconceptions you had about the partner or did it confirm them?

In the beginning I had a perception that it would be too difficult for organisations to work together and find a mutual way of working. We decided to stay in project and I'm pleased we did. We are a single organisation like the partner who stayed. We learnt a lot from the project. We stayed because we thought it was important to have a different approach. This partner was very professional and skilled. By the end of the project we took a very active part. Sometimes it takes time to find roles and positions.