

INCIDENT NO. 2

## THEME: Diverse Leadership - The Influence of Cultural Backgrounds of Organizations on Management Styles

The incident happened in a Socrates project on Education through diversity. The project has a duration of 2 years.

### How would you describe the situation?

The case concerns a long term project and namely the management of meetings.

Two meetings have been held up to now. In the first one participation was open to all the partner organisations and to others organisations involved in the project but not directly. 2 people per organisation took part in the meeting, so the number of participants was very high.

The management of the first meeting was controlled by the coordinator, the setting was very formal: the coordinator in front of the others holding the microphone, other people didn't have access to the microphone, so they could hardly make comments or express their opinion. People expected to have an active role in the meeting (most of them are very experienced) while in the coordinator's view, participants were supposed to listen.

10 countries were involved in the beginning, but some decided to quit before the end of the project.

### Questions for Reflection

#### At what stage in the project did it occur?

At the beginning of the kick-off meeting.

#### Who was involved?

Partners are schools and NGOs, the promoter is a public organisation.

#### Where did it occur?

In a face-to-face meeting.

#### How did other partners react?

There wasn't any official reaction but clearly people were not happy. Some partners decided to quit the project, although there were different reasons for this choice, the unpleasant working atmosphere had a role in it.

#### What did YOU do?

I didn't react in public and decided to wait and see. In the second meeting there were less people and things went better.

### What happened as a result?

People felt frustrated, especially those with more experience, because they were treated like students. Every partner was supposed to make an action research project in each country and present the results during the meeting. We expected to share the results, give and receive feedback while the coordinator simply expressed judgement about partners' work as if it was an exam or a school test.

### Analysing the Incident

#### What were the main challenges/conflicts?

Decisions were taken without a shared process, the coordinator's attitude was very formal, the setting of the meeting did not facilitate a good process amongst the participants.

Virtual communication was inaccurate too, we didn't receive any report of the meeting and there wasn't any e-mail to remind of deadlines, no communication was given to inform that some of the partners decided to quit the project.

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

I think there could be a relation with the school system in the coordinator's country, which is rather authoritative, somehow this approach was reproduced in the meeting.

I think there is also an aspect related to organisational culture, the coordinator is a University professor used to a very formal working environment and decided to use methods that are appropriate to a university context but not to these kind of projects.

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

I had a confirmation of my stereotype of (.....) people being not punctual. We always started the sessions out of time and people did not seem worried about the delay.

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

Personally I don't think I could have done anything different.

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

To pay much attention to the organisational aspects of both relationships with partners and logistic stuffs as setting, and participants' comfort.

Moreover work methods should be adequate to participants number; in this case there were more than 50 people and it was not possible to give the floor to all those who wanted to say something. In the second meeting we worked in small groups and it was easier and more effective.