

Incident No. 3

Theme: Basic Skills

The incident occurred during a 2-year project with 12 partners

Questions for Reflection

At what stage in the project did it occur?

From the very beginning: One person introduced himself at the kick-off meeting, everybody could see (and hear) that he was not used to communication in the English language. He of course did all the paper and reporting work required, but speaking, especially pronouncing was so difficult for him.

Who was involved?

The whole group was involved as everybody could see and hear that there is a communication problem

Where did it occur?

Mainly at the meetings. All meetings because there was almost no progress visible in the end.

Analysing the Incident

What were the main challenges/conflicts?

The person was obstructed in communicating with the others and they on the other hand (most of them) didn't want to embarrass him so they did not ask him or approach him for any conversation. The fact that it wasn't his field of professional specialisation also influenced him in terms of not being able to be part of the discussion in presence. But unfortunately at the same time this person did not *participate* in the project in an adequate way. What made it difficult for me was that I always had the feeling that this person is missed out by us. But at the same time I felt unable to solve this.

What happened as a result?

In the end I realised that I hardly knew him, I hardly knew about his opinion on many things and questions referring to the projects objectives. Just after a few years, when the project was finished I heard, by talking to the coordinator, that he gained a lot of experience, both language wise and professional from that project. During the process this was almost invisible, especially during the meetings.

How did other partners react?

There was no problem arising through this for the group or the project, because everybody reacted with respect towards this person. Nobody felt directly irritated or complained, also not when the person was absent. Probably it was because of the strong group feeling that existed. Everybody somehow accepted it how it was.

What did **YOU** do?

Looking at it today, I see that because everybody accepted the fact, the partnership didn't do anything nor tried to discuss it together to find a solution or to come to a common basis with that partner. From my point of view this also was because the

partners by age belonged to a generation where paying respect to other people is an important part of behaviour within groups.

I also kept quiet, thinking that this is something that can happen during EU-projects and accepting it like this. I left it up to the coordinator to deal with this. Somehow I felt that for everybody it was ok like this.

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

Today I would try to approach the person carefully and try to find a way to communicate. Just to make him feel that he is part of the group, surely. I would also try to ask the others how they think about it.

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

Helpful tools for such a situation could be mapping of language competencies at the beginning and for further project process of course the initiative from the group, from each member is required then. It is about facilitating each group member to be part although one's pace might not keep up with the other's.

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

The person's origin is from the Baltic countries. So, due to the lack of the need and possibility of learning English during the Soviet Union's epoch, the cultural background played a major role in this case.

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

Yes, taking into account that this person had not had the chance to learn English at school or anywhere else, it was clear for me that this is the reason for the problem. But at the same time I thought: One should take into account how big the challenge for this person was to work within this project and to gain experience of it in the end.