



Bridging the Culture Gap in a Large Oil & Gas Company

Client Request

Our client was the Canadian subsidiary of a global oil & gas company headquartered in Europe. This organization increased its workforce significantly in a short period of time and plans to continue expanding its operations in Canada over the next 10 to 20 years through a combination of organic growth, acquisitions and joint ventures. As a result, the organization experienced several significant cross culture challenges:

- There was a significant gap between local (Canadian) employees and expatriates. The division was visible within the executive team, where both groups felt their contributions were undervalued by members of the other group.
- Within their joint ventures, cross-cultural issues resulting from national and organizational differences slowed down the joint decision-making process and created significant ill will.

Approach

This project evolved over time and the scope of the project increased as people realized that the impact of cultural differences ran much deeper than they initially thought.

- We provided one-on-one coaching to the incoming CEO (starting with a face-to-face meeting at the European headquarters) to help him hit the ground running. He clearly realized the importance of the human factor as a critical element of his expansion strategy and took many actions to make inclusiveness a strategic differentiator of his organization within a highly competitive labour market;
- We started by providing cross-cultural training to all employees in order to make them aware of the cross-cultural nature of the challenges they were facing. Since many had worked in several countries, this training program helped put their past experiences in perspective and helped them realize that cultural differences had significantly more impact than they thought;
- We facilitated several off-site meetings of the executive team of the organization and of its joint ventures:
 - We started by individually interviewing key stakeholders to uncover the different perspectives people had on the issues faced by the team;
 - We created reports describing the key issues and the various perspectives people had on these issues, and used these findings to create the overall meeting agenda;
 - We facilitated the meeting by bringing forward the cultural components of the discussions and by running cross-cultural team-building activities.

Outcomes

As the scope of the project expanded, we went beyond the tactical aspects of implementation of the organization's cultural diversity and inclusion initiatives and became increasingly involved in the creation of the overall integration strategy of the organization. Our client highlighted several areas where our contributions made a significant difference to their progress:

- The CEO considered our initiatives as having contributed significantly to the progress and on-going success of the company's expansion strategy;
- The executive team attributed a significant decrease in the tension between local employees and expatriates to the solutions we provided (training and off-site facilitation);
- Senior managers included cross-cultural solutions in their business plans right from the design stage;
- We were asked to contribute to the creation of a five-year culture integration strategy, as well as a strategy to recruit from a culturally diverse talent pool.