

RECONCILING THE DILEMMA - by Vincent MERK, Eindhoven University of Technology

After presenting a short definition of the dilemma (di-lemma = double proposition) and briefly reviewing some well-known cases featuring dilemmas, the presenter moved into the core of the matter. The workshop was divided in two sessions. The first part was a review of the Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner approach to dilemmas using the Samsung Case or Korean Case example. In this group exercise participants were asked to define the dilemma, discuss the issue and propose various solutions to reconcile it in a win-win situation for all parties. This session ended with a short plenary debriefing (for a full description of this case and the process carried out towards reconciliation, see in Hampden-Turner, C. & Trompenaars, F. 2000, p 46-48).

The second part was a hands-on exercise with the reconciliation of a given dilemma. The group decided to work in 2 groups each with 1 dilemma:

- 1) "Face to Face Communication Vs Screen to Screen Communication" (D1) and
- 2) "Building the stable learning organisation with job-hopping professionals" (D2).

The methodology used in this second part was based on the 6 steps towards reconciliation, as developed by the authors. The participants received a reconciliation grid and an overview of the 6 steps. The reconciliation grid features the two starting positions (extremes) of the given dilemma: Position 1 and Position 2, and the four possible ending points: 1,10 or loose-win, 10,1 or win-loose, 5,5 or loose-loose/compromise and finally 10,10 or win-win/reconciliation. Then the participants started the exercise using the reconciliation grid and going through the following steps:

Step 1: Eliciting the dilemma

The 2 groups agreed on whom was the dilemma holder, most likely a person dealing with face to face and screen to screen communication in an intercultural context (D1), and a HR manager (D2). Then the following dimensions were identified: diffuse vs. specific, affective vs. neutral and particularistic vs. universalistic for D1 and the time dimension, short vs. long term, for D2.

Step 2: Charting the dilemma

Both axis were labelled with the 2 horns (Position 1 and 2) of each of the dilemmas and the relevant dimensions added in the vertical and horizontal way.

Step 3: Stretching the dilemma

Note the positives (+) and negatives (-) of Position 1 and 2.

For D1, some of the positives listed were builds relationship, group building, use all senses, full communication package (face to face) and cheaper, consistent message, multiformat, clarity, efficiency, time and location neutralised, reliable (screen to screen).

For D2: increase quality, career path, low HR cost, knowledge capture (long term) and innovation, openness, stronger culture, energetic (short term).

The negatives reported were:

D1: expensive, frustration, requires same place and time, low reach and high cost (face to face) and impersonal, no exploration of possible misunderstandings, one way communication, low context, information overkill (screen to screen).

D2: suffocating, bureaucracy, unmotivated people (long term) and high HR costs, little learning, no career path (short term).

Step 4: Finding epithets

Some findings for D1 were: frequent flyers, decision around the campfire (face to face) and remote and impersonal management (screen to screen). Chat room, telephone call, e-mails with smileys (compromise 5/5).

For D2: permanent school (long term) and clearing house, value goes (short term). Job limping, controlled hopping (compromise 5/5).

Step 5: Reconciling the dilemma

After going through the whole process as featured on the hand-out, the 2 groups proposed as labels for 10/10: "Meet, maintain, monitor" as a possible company policy, use the holographic

webcam or mobile telephones with a camera and display (D1) and develop a knowledge economy, you'll never hop alone (D2).

Step 6: Implementing the new design (Action Plan)

What actions should be undertaken to realise this reconciliation? Due to a lack of time, these action points were left to the initiative of the participants.

Possible measures are for D1: build trust in face to face sessions or with fission-fusion dynamic programs, personalise e.mail communications by setting ground rules, develop web-conferencing as a support to real face to face, use international English for e-mails (this particularly meant for anglophones!), etc. For D2: develop knowledge sharing schemes and agreements, create alliances and expertise centres, facilitate networks, introduce incubator elements into the organisation, etc.

References:

- Hampden-Turner, C. & Trompenaars, F. "Building Cross-Cultural Competence", J. Wiley & Sons, Chichester, 2000
- Trompenaars, F. & Hampden-Turner, C. "Riding the Waves of Culture", N. Brealey Publishing, 2nd Edition, London, 1998