



GETTING LOST IN DETAIL

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“Ahmet” –Project Coordinator of Performance Management System

I was put in charge of the project to set up a performance measurement system company-wide based on a software program. Within one year, I had coordinated the departments and process owners for setting their relevant performance measurement parameters (KPI and KPR)¹. I had worked with a software company, and we transferred all these measurement parameters to a shared platform for managers. I also undertook coordination within the company to ensure the continuity of the system.

Turkey was a pilot project for the establishment of this system, and it was aimed to establish company-wide integrity by implementing the same system at other locations of our multinational company. For this reason, a cross-cultural team was formed with responsibility from all locations. My role in the team was to share the lessons learned from the pilot study with other locations and provide support when needed. The Indian unit would also take a big responsibility for the IT support of the project. All teams came together at a benchmark meeting in Turkey; in that meeting, I shared my experiences and outputs of our project to colleagues from 10 different locations. I met the Indian group of 4 colleagues at this benchmark meeting. I realized that they would knock on my door long before the others would and drag out the project.

My intuition was right and I received an online meeting invitation from the Indian group via email at the beginning of the week. After the benchmark meeting, when they returned to their locations, they wanted to clear some questions in their minds. It was a busy week for me, but due to my support role in the team, it would not be acceptable for me to reject the request, or delay it too much. Despite my busy schedule, I was able to find a 1-hour time frame between two meetings, and planned an online meeting with them.

An agenda for the meeting had not come through but I was okay to continue the online session spontaneously in questions and answers. When it was time for the meeting, we exchanged pleasantries since we had built a warm relationship during our last face-to-face meeting. After the greetings, we passed on to the questions with my encouragement; otherwise, the greeting part may take longer. While answering the questions, my mind was inevitably on the next

¹ KPI: Key Performance Indicator, KPR: Key performance results



meeting with the senior executives. I was trying to create 5 minutes that would allow me to finish this meeting as soon as possible and prepare for the next meeting in between. That's why I was giving quick serial answers to questions. Going through many of the topics we had discussed at the benchmark meeting, the group wanted to clarify them repeatedly.

The meeting deepened with the following detailed questions. The Indian group was getting more excited with the questions; however, in my opinion, we were circling around many details that were unnecessary to discuss at that time. I was getting nervous. The tension inevitably reflected on my face and the tone of my voice. Maybe, since we weren't face to face, or they were too excited about the topic, I couldn't see any empathy for my situation from the other side. This made me even angrier. Now my answers were short and reluctant. A heat covered my whole body from head to foot. All I wanted was for this meeting to end as soon as possible. The more I wanted it to end, the more excited the group became. Now they started to argue amongst themselves. This discussion, which I was completely excluded from, lasted almost 7 minutes. Several times I tried to interrupt, wrap up the topic and end the meeting with a few concluding sentences, but each time I was struck by a new question that popped up. I checked the time. My next meeting was 2 minutes away and the group could no longer hear me. I couldn't even continue for more than two seconds. At that moment, I found myself pressing the "leave the meeting" button. Then I quickly sent the group an email saying that I was disconnected for a technical reason, that we had a good meeting, and we could meet again later if there were any further questions. I needed to wash my face and prepare for the next meeting.

Questions

- ✓ *What is the main problem in the case?*
- ✓ *What kind of person is Ahmet? How does he cope with negative emotions such as; anger, stress?*
- ✓ *Do you think that controlling difficult emotions in work is an essential cross-cultural skill? How could one improve this skill?*
- ✓ *What is the challenge of running cross-cultural virtual meetings with Indian colleagues?*
- ✓ *What would you do if you were Ahmet?*
- ✓ *What could be the main needs of Indian colleagues? What could be the appropriate way to fulfill their needs?*
- ✓ *What could be the strategies for the next virtual meeting with Indian colleagues?*



Recommended Reading

Shaffer, M. A., Harrison, D. A., Gregersen, H., Black, J. S., & Ferzandi, L. A. (2006). You can take it with you: Individual differences and expatriate effectiveness. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 91(1), 109–125.

Arora, R., & Rangnekar, S. (2015). Relationships between emotional stability, psychosocial mentoring support and career resilience. *Europe's Journal of Psychology*, 11(1), 16-33.

Bajaj, B., Gupta, R. & Sengupta, S. (2019). Emotional stability and self-esteem as mediators between mindfulness and happiness. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 20, 2211-2226.

Hills, P., & Argyle, M. (2001). Emotional stability as a major dimension of happiness. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 31(8): 1357-1364.



GETTING LOST IN DETAIL – TEACHING GUIDE

1. Synopsis

A cross-cultural team has been established to develop a shared platform for the company's performance measurement system. Turkey is the team coordinator, and Indian colleagues will set the same system and give IT support to all locations. Turkish colleague Ahmet arranged an online meeting with a group of Indian colleagues to support their project steps. He is result-oriented, and he was expecting to go-to solution concisely, but he was stuck with long conversations and details. He realized that the Indian group had examined the situation together on their own to build consensus for every simple issue. He was exhausted at the end of the 1 hour and had nothing in his hand. He was frustrated.

2. Teaching Strategy and Teaching Objectives

Students /learners will be able to:

- ✓ Understand what is “emotional stability” in a cross-cultural context. Learn to cope with negative/difficult emotions.
- ✓ Understand how cultural differences affect the success of cross-cultural virtual team meetings.
- ✓ Find appropriate solutions to the different needs of different cultural partners.

3. Target Audience

- ✓ Undergraduate students in all business-related disciplines

4. Questions & Answers for Case Analysis and Teaching

- ✓ **Open the discussion**

What is the main problem in this case?

- ✓ **Advance the discussion**

What kind of person is Ahmet? How does he cope with negative emotions such as; anger, stress?

Do you think that controlling difficult emotions in work is an essential cross-cultural skill? How could one improve this skill?

What is the challenge of running cross-cultural virtual meetings with Indian colleagues?

- ✓ **Close the discussion**

What would you do if you were Ahmet?



What could be the main needs of Indian colleagues? What could be the appropriate way to fulfill their needs?

What could be the strategies for the next virtual meeting with Indian colleagues?

5. Recommended Reading

Shaffer, M. A., Harrison, D. A., Gregersen, H., Black, J. S., & Ferzandi, L. A. (2006). You can take it with you: Individual differences and expatriate effectiveness. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 91(1), 109–125.

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GETTING LOST IN DETAIL – TEACHING NOTES

1. Summary of case study

A cross-cultural team has been established to develop a shared platform for the company's performance measurement system. Turkey is the team coordinator, and Indian colleagues will set the same system and give IT support to all locations. Turkish colleague Ahmet arranged an online meeting with a group of Indian colleagues to support their project steps. He is result-oriented, and he was expecting to arrive at a solution concisely, but he was stuck with long conversations and details. He realized that the Indian group had examined the situation together on their own to build consensus for every simple issue. He was exhausted at the end of the 1 hour and had nothing in his hand. He was frustrated.

2. Suggested methodology for 'solving' case study

✓ Open the discussion (15 min)

The discussion can be started with asking,

What is the main problem in the case?

✓ Advance the discussion (45 min)

The discussion can be deepened by following questions.

What kind of person is Ahmet? How does he cope with negative emotions such as; anger, stress?

Do you think that controlling difficult emotions in work is an essential cross-cultural skill? How could one improve this skill?

What is the challenge of running cross-cultural virtual meetings with Indian colleagues?

Based on these questions, in particular, what kind of challenging emotions did Ahmet face, why could he not cope with them, and what did Ahmet experience as a result? In this specific case, it may help to clarify what the cultural difference is that caused Ahmet to get nervous and angry. Through this example, the discussion can be carried to a more general level to what other challenging emotions employees may encounter and how may they react to them in an appropriate way. These questions may make participants think about the consequences of controlled/uncontrolled emotions.

After this awareness, the concept of emotional stability can be introduced. It can be mentioned that emotional stability is recognised as a significant predictor of job performance. Further, it can be emphasized that since cultural differences can create potential conflicts, managing emotions is even more important in multicultural work environments.



Discussion can deepen further by asking “what would be different if the meeting was face-to-face.”

✓ **Close the discussion (15 min)**

At the end of the discussion, participants can be encouraged to find their own solutions through the help of the following questions.

What would you do if you were Ahmet?

What could be the main needs of Indian colleagues? What could be the appropriate way to fulfil their needs?

What could the strategies be for the next virtual meeting with Indian colleagues?

3. Possible answers

In the case, Ahmet has an online meeting to develop a joint project with a group of Indian colleagues. The Indian group need detailed information about the project steps thus they have many questions. However, Ahmet is too busy, and he thinks it is unnecessary to waste time with all these details in the beginning stage. Instead of understanding the different needs of his partners, he gets angry, lost his calm and emotional control.

Ahmet is a responsible employee who takes too much work on himself.

“they wanted to clear some questions in their minds. It was a busy week for me, but due to my support role in the team, it would not be acceptable for me to reject the request, or delay it too much. Despite my busy schedule, I was able to find a 1-hour time frame between two meetings, and planned an online meeting with them.”

However, Ahmet is overwhelmed by excessive responsibilities from time to time and cannot manage his workload and stress well. He has neurotic behaviours which can be characterised by greater variability between high and low levels of negative emotion. He also has a tendency to behave in a passive-aggressive way such as expressing negative feelings indirectly instead of openly addressing them. He is not aware of his feelings and needs thus instead of expressing them he experiences emotional outbursts (stress, anger).

“A heat covered my whole body from head to foot. All I wanted was for this meeting to end as soon as possible.” “At that moment, I found myself pressing the “leave the meeting” button. Then I quickly sent the group an email saying that I was disconnected for a technical reason, that we had had a good meeting, and we could meet again later if there were any further questions.”

When one encounters different cultures and needs in multinational environments, he/she may be more nervous and sensitive because of going out of our comfort zone. Emotional stability is very important in such a context. Understanding and controlling our emotions



opens up the necessary space to understand the needs of the other party. This ability is also recognised as a significant predictor of job performance and it holds a key role in maintaining conducive workplace social interactions.

The online meeting made it difficult for Ahmet to express himself and understand the needs of the other partners. For this reason, Ahmet experienced these neurotic feelings more strongly online.

“Several times I tried to interrupt, wrap up the topic and end the meeting with a few concluding sentences, but each time I was struck by a new question that popped up”.

Mindfulness can be a useful way to improve the ability of emotional stability. Mindfulness has been conceptualised as an ability to be aware of what is happening at the present moment by evaluating those experiences without judging. Researchers in the field of positive psychology have identified high linkage between mindfulness and self-regulation. Engaging mindfully in the present moment brings more clarity about current experiences and current emotions without being biased; thus expression of feelings and communication may be conducted in a healthy way.

If Ahmet was more aware of himself at that moment, he could evaluate the situation more objectively and understood that the needed information from the other side. By expressing his workload, he might organize a meeting at a more convenient time and this could reduce his stress and allow him to manage the situation. Also, a well-prepared meeting agenda would help Ahmet to manage meeting time more effectively, especially with Indian colleagues.

