

Diversity in research projects — A key to success

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Each partner involves different ...

Introduction

Many studies investigated the benefits for business projects that are diverse regarding the composition of consortium members. They indicate an increase in creativity, innovation and productivity when diversity is implemented in the working groups [1; 2]. However, the **impact of diversity in research projects is still under-investigated**.

Here we base our experiences on the following research projects:

- The **TRION** Project funded by the DFG (Ei 272/30), running since 2012, is a cooperation project where German, Israeli and Palestinian scientists investigated the journey of trace metals from the chemical weathering of rock on land to their incorporation in the skeletons of corals. Beside the scientific objectives the **societal goal** was to **build trust** and **networks across political boundaries** through **science** as the **unifying instrument**.
- **BASE-LiNE Earth** is a European Training Network (ETN; MSCA 643084) within the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions in Horizon 2020. **BASE-LiNE Earth** started in 2015, and is committed to fill the gaps in trace element and isotope time series of the Phanerozoic Ocean. It comprises a **network** of more than 40 scientists from **academia and non-academia** coming from 17 countries **all over the world with different cultural backgrounds**.

Two research projects with different scientific objectives but similar **challenges**.

Challenges?

Despite the benefits diversity can bring in, it also presents challenges that must be identified. In a globalized world successful research needs to **bring together** experts from different **countries**, who speak different **languages**, have different **religious** and **political affiliations**, **personal skills**, **competences** and **qualifications**, and last but not least different **personalities**. The overall challenge of the project management (PM) is to bring together all the diversity of partners in a **friendly and respectful environment** and **support the creation of common goals driven by science**.

References

- [1] Chang, M.J., Witt, D., Jones, J. and Hakuta, K. 2003. *Compelling Interest: Examining the Evidence on Racial Dynamics in Colleges and Universities*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
[2] Herring, C. 2009. *Does Diversity Pay?: Race, Gender, and the Business Case for Diversity*. *American Sociological Review* 74: 208-224.
[3] Okokon O. Udo, PhD <http://xculture.org/cultural-competency-programs/about-cultural-competency/>

Management tools

To eliminate as many **potential conflicting points** as possible the requirements, interests, working abilities and concerns of the partners need to be **identified** at the very **beginning** of the project. Even if impossible to plan everything ahead,

- ✓ good **preparation** and
- ✓ **communicating** effectively

have been identified to be among the most important abilities of a project manager.

The Project Managers is the **connecting element** that establishes the network, maintains it and can detect and defuse possible problems as quickly as possible.

The **quality** of the management is reflected by **flexibility**, **transparency**, the ability to **adapt fast** to changing conditions, **sensibility** to identify special needs, and last but not least by the ability to listen and understand. To deal with cultural diversity the management should create an **atmosphere of mutual trust, tolerance and respect**.

BUT ...

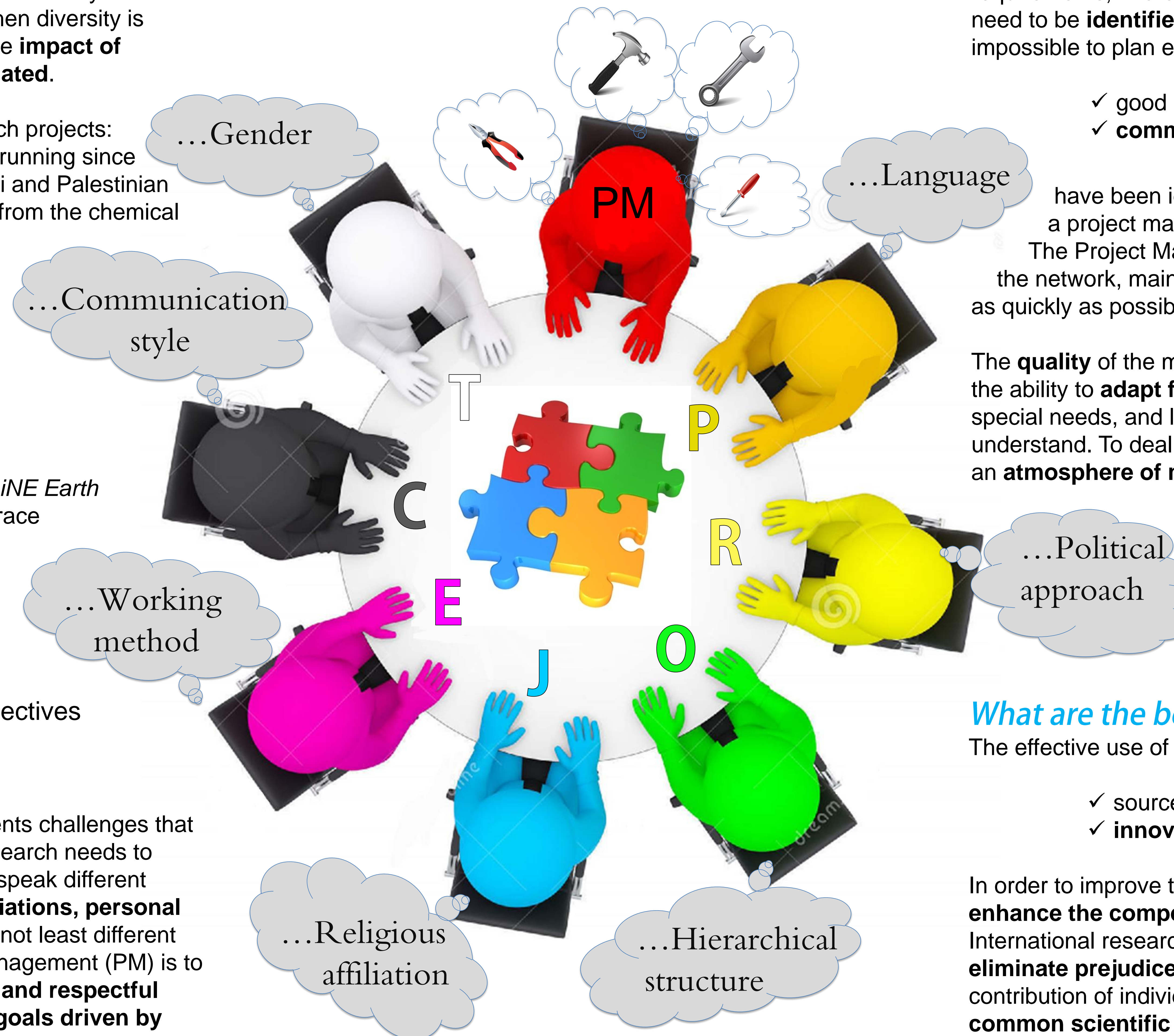
*“to be culturally competent doesn't mean you are an authority in the values and beliefs of every culture. What it means is that you **hold a deep respect for cultural differences** and are **eager to learn**, and **willing to accept** that there are many ways of viewing the world” [3].*

What are the benefits?

The effective use of cross-cultural research teams can provide a

- ✓ source of **experience**, and
- ✓ **innovative** thinking

In order to improve the likelihood of **project success** and **enhance the competitive position** of all organizations involved International research teams can also promote **cohesiveness** and **eliminate prejudices** as a chance to overcome conflicts. By the contribution of individuals and groups from all over the world towards **common scientific goals**, independent of any kind of differences, may lead to **mutual understanding and friendship**, not only between scientists, but also between **nations**. Furthermore, diversity in research projects is a resource to propose strategies for **equality** that will advance knowledge and enhance **public policy decision-making**.



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