



# IODA NEWS

July 2010



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## Editor's Notes

Alette Vonk

### African Laughter

One day, during the time I was working in one of the African countries, I came back from a work visit to one of the districts in the region. I had heard a couple of things that had upset me and after returning to the office, I dashed into the room of my teamleader and started to report my findings. Incensed, I told him how the Mayor of the town I visited, had handed out television sets to the Chiefs in his district. Televisions that had been sent over by some unknown donor, meant to arrive at elementary schools to be used as an aid in education. I looked at my teamleader, patiently sitting behind his desk while I stood before him. I was probably gesticulating, frustration in my voice and disbelief in my eyes, saying something in the vein of 'can you believe such an appalling act?' Can you believe that these televisions, meant for elementary schools where poor children are trying to learn something, and sent over by some well-meaning people, are just being used for the political gain of the Mayor?!

My teamleader looked me in the eye and... burst out in laughter. My mouth fell open. I felt he really thought this was funny! The man was actually and honestly amused and had a very good laugh over this cunning Mayor that had been able to lay his hands on a few televisionsets.

I will never forget that moment. I must have left the room bewildered, completely puzzled.

Ofcourse my teamleader didn't approve the act of the Mayor. Ofcourse he shared my opinion that these sets should have been handed over to the schools. But what was the use of my indignation? Our office would certainly not interfere with the relationship between the Mayor and his Chiefs. At least not over these televisionsets. This incident may have been part of our circle of concern, to speak in terms of Stephen R. Covey. The knowledge itself was useful. But it lay definitely outside our circle of influence.

The laughter of my teamleader, therefore, can much better be interpreted as a very wise act of coping behavior. After all, humor saves us from going nuts or becoming depressed, doesn't it?

It's years later now and I have returned to the Netherlands. To my own astonishment I find myself laughing outloud over similar incidents, that I encounter in my own country as well. Immediately I see the puzzle in my compatriots eyes. I get reactions like: "But this isn't funny at all!" Or: "But this is serious, you shouldn't be laughing over this!" Luckily for me, I have some friends who despite their amazement, recognize the freedom in (what I now call my African) laughter: "Ah! Your laugh is such a relief!"



It registers aspects of the intensity of that moment: repetition entails intensity, in this equation.

In the picture below you can follow which were the most common feelings from ODWS organizers in the middle of April. Take your time, browsing through our ODWS Cloud, and let us introduce you to the organizers most important definitions:

- Mary Lou Cook



**Creativity** is the main engine for our work, the tool to fulfill our purpose. It is diverse, intense and helps us fill the process with energy. It is in the focus of our Spice Team too, whose task is to ensure the balance of the conference. A meeting such as this Summit would only be a simple professional gathering without the appropriate social, or non-professional, programs that may bond people together. Our aims are to help give birth to a strong community of the forthcoming Summit and to support its co-creation and cross-fertilization goals. By tailoring social programs to professional ones, we - the Spice Team especially - intend to intensify the community's creative potency.

*“A world community can only exist with world communication, which means something more than extensive software facilities scattered about the globe. It means common understanding, a common tradition, common ideas and common ideals.”*

- Robert M. Hutchin



With around 300 enthusiastic participants, 80 carefully selected presenters and 11 outstanding **inspirational leaders** contributing throughout the whole gathering and the eight Master Classes before and after the Summit, we think we are set for the meaningful Dialogue & Action we envisioned more than four years ago. With the Spice programs above mentioned, we are making sure that these essential ingredients are well “cooked” together.

*“There is no such a thing as strangers,  
only friends that haven’t yet met.”  
W.B. Yeats*

The third word is **Friends**, not only the relationship with our fellow volunteer organizers but the possibility of meeting new people who also share the same values and passion with us.

We invite you to come and meet your friends: people who are willing to listen and also experts of their field. They will be the ones who can give you feedback, tools, more ideas, and the chance of growing. Be inspired, we can’t wait to meet you.



Finally we would like to invite you to co-create the next cloud with us:

#### **Cloud of Expectations**

Write five (5) words to us about your expectations of a great OD World Summit. Describe with these words how the Summit should happen to make you want to be part of our story. You can use this tool to channel your intuitions, feelings (perhaps fears) about the conference too. (We are expecting your words either if you are coming or not, it is a great chance to receive feedbacks and help us fine tune the program.)

Please visit and check our website - [www.odworldsummit.org](http://www.odworldsummit.org) - for the latest details on content and the flow of the Summit and just fall in love with our speakers and presenters or simply get washed away by the concept of co-creating new approaches and initiatives across boundaries on the spot.

Hope to see you in August,  
Best regards,

**The ODWS International Design Team and the Organizing Committee**

## The Roma People in Hungary: Trin Pasura – Three Steps

Rita Kandiko, Hungary



### Introduction

The Roma, or in other words “gypsies” are a people living in Hungary. They make up the largest officially recognized nationality. They are the only one that does not have a motherland among the nationalities in Hungary and are therefore not defined as a national minority but as an ethnic minority. Ethnic minorities cannot be registered without the written consent of the person in question.

Since the census data regarding the Roma does not reflect the reality, we can use the sociologists’ estimates based on surveys to establish the number of the Hungarian Roma. Accordingly, the country’s Roma population amounts to more than 800,000 (about 8 % of the overall population).

The most severe problem of the Roma population is posed by the dire living conditions characteristic of the majority. Unemployment rates are the largest among them: there are settlements in East and Northeast Hungary where 80-90 % of the adult Roma living there do not have employment. Their vast majority has to live off state support, unemployment- and child benefits.

The majority of the Hungarian Roma live in large families, usually in narrow economic circumstances. In 1963, there were 4.52 children in an average Roma family. At the time, this was 52% more than the estimated family average of the overall Hungarian population (3,18). However, life expectancy is much lower among the Roma, the rate of Roma people in retired ages is small.

### Project

This case study is about the Roma youth integration program called “Trin Pasura” whose aim was to strengthen the collaboration between the professional workers and to create a valuable network among organizations in the field of Romani integration.

The participants, social workers and assistants, unemployed workers, teachers and ex-local MPs, all shared one thing - all of them have done field work with Romani youngsters. Túristvándi, a village mainly inhabited by Romani people in eastern Hungary, was home to the project. This territory is one of the most underdeveloped parts of the country, extremely poor. It provides hands-on experience for the participants and is subject for field studies.

The local Romani who took part (with the help of a local community developer) in the *preparation* were the youth community, the ex-president of the municipality; Romani people with big families also took part. The first training course focused on actual information regarding the Romani community, understanding Romani culture and developing cross-cultural competencies. During the *coaching* period the youngsters received personal support on how to develop their own projects at home. Nearly half of the participants chose a personal goal, such as to learn about the details of the application system for youths, to develop their communication competence in English language and youth work, and increase their knowledge about the Romani reality. Some of them wrote the applications in the frame of the Youth in Action program.

From the group, four people participated in the Lifelong Learning Program, Grundtvig M3 Mobility of Innsbruck. They made a very serious effect on the representatives of the partners with their strong and active participation. During the second training, we examined the possibilities of the EU findings, we went deeply into the methodology of leading groups, and we discussed the possibility of mediation between the Romani and non-Romani groups .

The group expressed a strong intention to maintain the cooperation among the members of the project. This cooperation and supervision could be the stronghold for those working on supporting and fostering the peaceful coexistence between Romani and non-Romani people.

We managed to achieve long-lasting effects on the settlement that was hosting the events of the project, too. Based on the ideas of the youngsters they are planning an international exchange on peer education. We believe that this project has great chances to win support. Should they succeed, youngsters who have never had a chance even for a good holiday, will stand a chance to get great input and motivation to choose their own career.

**Case studies:****1. 23 years old Roma young boy**

I am a 23 year-old Roma guy. I was raised in an orphanage and I still live there. I have been participating in youth programs. Since I have a deeply rooted fear for starting my own career and becoming independent, I think what I need mostly is encouragement

I have acquired two professions, one as a painter and the other one is a waiter, and besides this I dance and sing in a band that plays authentic Roma music. In spite of this I don't really see how I can make a living on my own without any family support. While I was looking for a job I felt it on my skin what it was like to be a Roma: although I applied to many places I was not hired because of my Roma origin.

The fact that I was able to participate in the M3 project gave me a lot of strength and inspiration. In Paris I saw that young people of Afro-American origin are in an even more disadvantaged situation than I am. Meanwhile, I learnt that I can also manage to speak in a foreign language; I simply have to start and do it without fear.

I can see how I can use my abilities in my everyday life a lot more clearly, now.

**2. "Because I wanted it so..."**

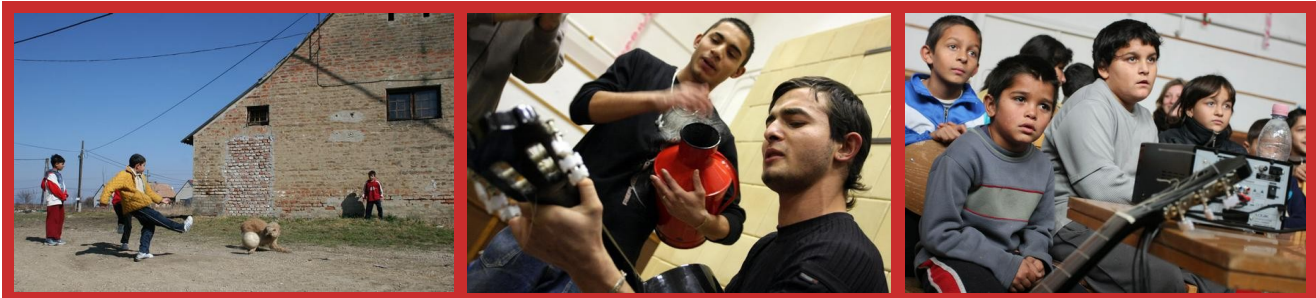
It has been more than 25 springs since I was born in Kisvárdá. My mother was very young (only 15 years old) when I was born. So naturally my mother's parents raised me together with my mother. Besides them the whole street were my parents!! since my mother's girlfriends also loved and cared for me. I was raised in Demecser in the Roma slums. We were very poor. My grandmother and grandfather were visiting villages and collected metal waste and feather, and my mother worked in the household. I was about 12 years old when I came to the decision that I do not want a life similar to those who live in our street. A life without plans, goals, aims, is a life with no opportunities. Therefore I decided, when I grow old I will live differently - I will have my own goals. Unfortunately I could not go to kindergarten but I liked going to school all the better. Because of my Oláh origin Hungarian words were strange for me during the elementary school, but by the time it was ten I was able to speak clearly the language of the country.

I really loved school and my non-Roma friends because I just got good things from them. They encouraged me and told me to go on, to continue. I was among the good students and it remained so during the secondary school. During the years of the secondary school I already knew that I would stand up for the interests of the Roma people and I made everything for making myself well - known and to be understood. I wanted that when people hear my name, they associate it with positive and good things.

I took part in several things: I was a dancer, a singer, a musician, the editor of a newspaper so I can say that I have been active in the field of youth work. I play soccer and I participate in youth forums also. By the time of the third year in college I had become a member of the Local Roma Municipality and I became a member of the Social and Health Commission of my town. I made my degree in the field of Social Work and nowadays I work as a case manager for program sponsored by the European Union: I am helping unemployed people. I worked for the municipality of Nyíregyháza which is the closest large city and for the child welfare centre, too. Besides my permanent job, I still write articles for the local newspaper and I help youngsters to create their ideas for their community, I teach Lovari Romani language, do counseling, I am a football referee and I actively participate in the life of the civil society. I have been living with my bride, Adrienn for 5 years in a very happy relationship. Thanks God everything in my life is going well on the way I had decided when I was 12 years old. I hope that we will have a happy and calm life in our future house....

Ashen le dragone Devlesa!

Rita Kandikó & István Bakos



## Scholarship recipients ODWS Budapest, 2010



Ibidunni Adeniyi  
Nigeria  
Management Strategies for Africa, Country team leader Nigeria

Philosophy in Life?  
Be the best of you, work your skills, make an impact



Ana Marta Vasilache  
Romania

FPDL Partners Foundation for  
Local Development



Mimi Owueye, Nigeria  
Akada Konsults

Philosophy in Life?  
Always initiate change for the  
betterment of all at every given  
situation in life



Irshad Ahmad, Pakistan  
Iraj Education & Dev. Foundation

Philosophy in Life? Life is ugly if it  
is full of sufferings & violence: it  
is good if it is without sufferings  
and violence, therefore, we need  
to reduce sufferings.



Ylyn Reyes  
Singapore

Long Term Answers Consulting  
Service  
Founder/ Organisation Develop-  
ment Consultant



Owusu A. Linkoln Kwame  
Ghana

Medlink Capacity Consults  
Consultant / PhD Student



Helena Motta  
Kenya

WWF, Programme Manager  
Africa Madagascar Program



Rutger Nagel  
Germany

Student at University of Applied Science Goerlitz-Zittau

Philosophy in life? Life is beautiful!

## President's Words

### **A Journey from the Soccer World Cup towards IODA's 25th birthday celebration in Budapest**

Dear IODA Members, Friends and other Professionals,



These days the world is looking closely at all events in South Africa. I do not know what you feel but my heart is full of happy emotions. I remember so very well my first visit to this beautiful country. It was also my first experience with IODA. The 8th IODA World Conference took place in Cape Town in 1993. Apartheid still existed and I, as a person growing up in a socialist country, felt a deep shame at having to travel on buses which had separate areas for blacks and whites.

The conference was welcomed by the mayor. By the end of the week he had already given up his seat and a woman, although still white, then took over. South Africa was on the eve of a revolution which would be one of the most important steps in eradicating racism in the world and in releasing a new view on the beauty and value of multicultural diversity. I came to realize in this conference, when I first met this wonderful community of international OD professionals, that being with IODA meant not only that I was able to share and learn professionally, but also that I could get closer to what's going on our planet.

When we watch the pictures from the World Cup we easily can see the enormous potential for community development that is inherent in such global competition.

There are still many wounds in South African society which are healing slowly. I wish for our friends there that the World Cup is having similar effects to the ones it had for us in Germany four years ago. I never thought that I would one day buy a German flag. I was raised with a different one. Symbols such as a flag and a hymn are a strong part of one's identity. The soccer competition helped the German nation to stand together and proudly behind their flag. Interestingly, it was Turkish and other immigrants to Germany who started putting German flags on their cars and driving around after the matches. These immigrants taught my nation that the flag which had been so sullied during two world wars and the Holocaust is something that we now might finally begin to feel proud of again two generations later.

World Cup 2006 changed Germany. I hope World Cup 2010 will have the same healing power for South Africa. Today our EC member Michelle de Bruyn from Cape Town wrote to some of us about her emotions and her hope: "What a pity. My friends and I had a Ghana party on Friday to watch the game. The tension in the air was tangible, we shouted ourselves hoarse. We were all so sad that Ghana didn't make it through, but also so proud of the way the black stars played with their hearts. I hope our continent will continue to feel some of the solidarity that we have shared in the last week."



During the world cup we are showing and sharing our emotions....

During the last weeks I have exchanged a lot of emails with IODA members from hosting and participating and also from non-participating countries. After Germany's third goal against Argentina I got even a call from Mohan in India congratulating me on the excellent German play. Ben, Noble, Alette, Bill, K.C. and others sent emails! I shared sadness for the losses of the Nigerian and Ghanaian team. This is also something of IODA I value highly: I do not only see a match on a screen. I remember the street scenes and imagine the people's spirit in Cape Town, Abuja, Accra, Amsterdam, Sun Peaks, Barcelona, Guanajuato, etc. because IODA's conferences have brought me to these places and I have made friends with local OD practitioners. I identify their teams with them.

I would have wished Ruth de Bruyn who died in February could watch her country celebrating this feast of peace, joy and solidarity. It was her dream to see a new South Africa with self-confident citizens able to forgive and educated to build up a great example of a diverse country.

Change needs time, and change needs facilitation. The Turkish people taught me to stay to my flag. But I still do not know the words of the German national song. It still feels strange to identify with it since I myself grew up with a different song.

This is a little example for how important our work as OD practitioner is. People in companies have to cope with tremendous changes at an accelerating speed. How important for them is our facilitation.

You all can learn from the best OD professionals and change facilitators - and more than that - you can celebrate a world feast of OD by coming to Hungary in August! We OD professionals have our own World Cup in Budapest from August 22 to August 26. The OD World Summit brings for the first time very many international OD schools together in one locality. Don't miss this extraordinary event where we want to figure out which companies are the world champions in "next practises". You can learn from these examples in order to facilitate your customers to find their most appropriate way for a sustainable future. Let's "co-create our world of companies and communities!" Be part of the event and help to make it a success!

The OD World Summit is also IODA's 2010 World Congress. We are turning 25 this summer. Celebrate with us! We want to show the OD world IODA's uniqueness. It exists in its internationality and multiculturalism. There is no other similar organization in the world.

You can contribute to make the 25th birthday celebration during the OD World Summit a big success. We would be happy if you take your camera and make a short video clip about your OD work with the background of your country's needs, show some local symbols (places, buildings, landscapes, products, etc.) Tell us what IODA means to you. Upload the peaces to YouTube (very simple!!) and send us the url-addresses. We'll put it together. [silkehaebold@online.de](mailto:silkehaebold@online.de) This will be your personal mosaic puzzle showing the internationality and diversity of IODA.

Here you can register for the 25th IODA World Conference and the OD World Summit in one:

[www.od-worldsummit.org](http://www.od-worldsummit.org)

Today I send my regards from Kuching, Borneo, where I attend the Asian HRD conference. I'm representing IODA and hope to inspire OD interested colleagues from the Pacific region to participate next year in the Australian IODA conference.

By the way, I have my German flag in my bag. We will have at least one more match and hopefully two!

Have a wonderful summer holiday and see you all in Budapest August 22-26!

Dr. Ulla Nagel  
IODA President

[ulla.nagel@ipu-nagel.de](mailto:ulla.nagel@ipu-nagel.de)

## Fingers crossed for 501(c)3

Alette Vonk  
Communication Coordinator



In the IODA Newsletter from March 2009 we asked our members whether they approve of the idea to apply for the status of a 501(c)3 organization. In the July 2009 edition, we reported some of your answers, which were all very positive. Since then, the EC has begun the application procedure. At this stage we are waiting for a response from the North American Internal Revenue Service (IRS).

IODA is officially registered in the USA. It is a non-profit organization, also known as a 501(c). Presently, IODA is a 501(c) 6 organization, usually a category for business associations, chambers of commerce, real estate boards, etc. We are in the process of becoming a 501(c)3 organization. This category is used for organizations with religious, charitable, educational and/or scientific purposes.

There are a few reasons for IODA to change its status. The main reason is that the character and vision of IODA has never been to pursue business interests to the exclusion of all else. IODA has always tried to be as inclusive as possible, leading in reality to its pursuit of educational and human development objectives for peoples all over the world. The application mentions many examples, such as the pursuit of academic goals during our conferences, the establishment of a Masters and Ph.D. program in Bangkok, and the recent Delphi study. There are other educational and human development objectives as well, such as the great number of students who have benefitted from conference discounts, scholarships, and recently a young professionals fellowship program.

A second reason for the change is that IODA if it continues with its present status it will remain small, tapping from volunteers' time, efforts and finances. As a 501(c) 3, it will be possible to seek donations, gifts and endowments on a tax-free basis. This will enable the organization to grow in keeping with its recent geographical expansion and will facilitate the pursuit of some of our objectives such as master programs, internships and a journal.

The disadvantages are that IODA will have to become more professional in its operations. This will challenge our existing systems and internal (cross-cultural) communication. We shall have to be more transparent and accountable as an organization and this means the accounting and auditing process will be more rigorous.

In these past few months, emails have been exchanged around the world, as we busied ourselves with filling in the application forms. We have been discussing our purpose and the expression of it, and gathering data from previous conference hosts and past presidents. Several long standing members joined in the discussion and gave insight to the activities of IODA over the years. Our staff, Silke and Susan, has worked tirelessly to get all the documents in good order. Even as I write, a new mail comes in, asking for more clarification as demanded by the IRS. It is said that these applications are thoroughly scrutinized these days. It will take some time before an answer is given.

Wouldn't it be wonderful if IODA makes this next big step in its evolution, in this jubilee year of 25 years existence? Let's keep our fingers crossed!

Alette Vonk  
[alettevonk@yahoo.com](mailto:alettevonk@yahoo.com)

## Dr. Ulla Nagel has been elected to another term as IODA President

Election report by Ben Arikpo and Silke Haebold

We are pleased to confirm the re-election of IODA's President Dr. Ulla Nagel from Germany. Thank you Ulla for your renewed commitment to IODA, for your passion and your integrative leadership which has taken IODA to greater heights than previously experienced.

The Election Committee was looking forward to an exciting voting process with more than one candidate. However, the Committee received only one nomination for candidacy. We closed the voting process at the end of the nomination period and declared the one candidate, Ulla Nagel, as winner in line with the guidelines issued earlier.



IODA's previous and new president  
Dr. Ulla Nagel from Germany

Three women from around the Globe reflect on Ulla's engagement in IODA and how she is personally perceived:  
Glenda Hutchinson from Australia: "Ulla has been an inspiration to me with her enormous energy and passion for IODA and the work it can do around the world. She is the main reason I became involved with IODA - initially as a conference participant and eventually as a conference host-to-be in Australia. Her ideas and vision for IODA contribute to the vitality of this global organisation and its ongoing success."

Toki Mabogunje from Nigeria: "I think of Ulla as someone who worked her way to the top. Before she became President she was a very active member of IODA. Committed and engaged in every way to IODA's ideals. Since becoming President she has constantly searched for continued relevance to the membership looking at the practice of OD and the changing landscape. She has looked at sustainability by encouraging the younger generation of OD practitioners, she has looked at the global economy and encouraged expansion of the organization. In the process of course we are experiencing organizational challenges of our own and she is constantly consulting and seeking solutions."

Pashmi Trivedi from India: "Out of my experience, Ulla is a rich owner of most of the shades of a woman's role in existence. She is a beautiful, warm and sensitive person, a mother, a working woman and a leader known, respected and trusted by people."

### These are major achievements during Ulla Nagel's previous term as president:

- IODA is growing in its membership and spreading throughout the world
- Application to become a 501 (c) 3 organization which means IODA will hopefully receive tax-free donations in the future
- Establishment of more local chapters and regional networks
- Challenging future conference venues in line with our international orientation
- Implementation of active working groups where IODA members are more active throughout the year.
- The EC regularly meets between world conferences in telephone conferences and makes decisions to move IODA ahead.

### What are Ulla Nagel's intentions for the next term as president?

Her major focus is: How can we make IODA attractive for its members and especially interesting for new members? In a nut shell this means:

- Walk the talk: More contact, communication, inclusion, participation and dissemination of timely information to all stakeholders
- Enhance the professional standard: International project opportunities, labelling "IODA, involvement of young graduates, greater financial resources".

Dear Ulla, the Election Committee extends their congratulations to you. We wish you health, strength, success and confidence for your next term as IODA president.

The election committee: Ben Arikpo, Bill Kraus, Silke Haebold

## In memory of IODA members: Ruth de Bruyn and Noble Amewudah

### Poem in honour of Ruth de Bruyn by Pierre Tchomobe from Cameroon

Ruth, you have left us for ever but you remain in our mind.  
We know how available you were for IODA members.  
We know the contribution you brought to us, to young new IODA comers  
This can never be forgotten.

Where you are now, near the Almighty God, may your soul stay in happiness for ever  
The light you brought into IODA is still shining  
We will try to sustain this light for it to shine for ever

We will never forget you  
Bye Ruth,  
We will never forget you.

### Memory Mat of Ruth de Bruyn by Lily Mitchell from South Africa

My friend, Ruth, the freckled African with ginger eyes: I see her lovely warm and welcoming smile. I see her striding out on her customary walk up Northcliff Hill, near her home, cap on head and dark glasses for those eyes.

I see stairs, as they were her passion – just to get to the top and to be on top of her form. We often walked up local Westcliffe stairs; our path to fitness. So, just the other day, I thought about her at the foot of those endless stairs at Sacré Cœur, Paris.

I see her sitting on the bed in Dresden, shocked to the core, as we could not take our eyes off the TV and the horrific, terrifying and unbelievable scenes of 9/11 as those airplanes continued to crash into the World Trade Centre – the first afternoon before the opening of the Dresden IODA conference. What a time Ulla Nagel had.

I see the wonderful times and friendship we had with Ulla Nagel and family over the years in South Africa and elsewhere.

I see her sitting in the Dubai airport on 05.00 am on the way to the IODA St Petersburg conference. I see parts of that wonderful Moscow tour we did together with Pat Novak and her two lovely daughters. We went to the ballet and the opera and stood in front of the Bolshoi Theatre. I shared her delight as we sat in the front row of the royal box directly in front of the ballet – *Bright Stream* by Shostakovich.

I hear my haematite (iron ore) beads dropping all over the marble floor of the shop in the Hermitage museum, St Petersburg. I hear Ruth laughing out loud as both of us and the dear assistant scrambled and picked them up all up from under all the counters.

Then, there was that extraordinary snake dance entrance we all did to the final IODA dinner in St Petersburg, where, for the first time 14 Africans of different countries, nationalities, sizes, shapes and races acted as one team to celebrate the vibrancy of Africa and tempt the brave to go to Nigeria.

I recall the preparations for that African IODA meeting in Nigeria with Ben Arikpo in Johannesburg that Ruth organised.



Lily Mitchell, Ben Arikpo and Ruth



Michelle de Bruyn, Lily Mitchell, Karen Davis and Ruth

I hear her laugh and laugh with enthusiasm. I hear her laughing at Lance Cope as he carried home on his head the two huge flower pots we had bought for Mama Cello. We did this in appreciation for her hosting us so beautifully in a small village outside Oaxaca, after the Mexican meeting, where he and Tricia worked as Peace Corp Students installing latrines years ago. It was a time that Michelle, Ruth's daughter, Ruth and I shared the vibrancy and intrigue of the Mexican culture, craft and creativity.

I see the picture she loved, with the back of a naked girl among the Arum Lilies painted by Diego Rivera which Ruth bought from his home in Guanajuato, Mexico.

I hear her accepting people's views and also sharing her thoughts, insights and wisdom. I hear her talking with enthusiasm of the wonderful interactions she had with the young people at the IODA conferences in Germany, Russia and Mexico.

I hear Mervyn Davidowitz and her practise that first workshop she did for IODA.

I feel her warmth and humanity which caused her to be called 'Mama Ruth' by many Africans. I felt the wonderful relationships that she had with both Michelle and Leon, her children and the warmth she had for her ex-husband Trevor.

I still taste her wonderful apricot jam. I can taste the wonderful Angels Tears wine that we drank with Karin Davis in Mexico and the whisky we shared with Annette Simmons that kept us sane in Abuja, Nigeria. I taste the wonderful Kalhúa coffees over which we have had long discussions. The last time I saw her, we shared a piece of the most decadent Chocolate Mousse Cake in the world.

As the book 'Staring in the Sun' says you will find her among her friends. She did not leave ripples but great waves. You will find Ruth everywhere.

### Ruth de Bruyn in her own Voice

by: Lily Mitchell

I did an interview with Ruth that was published in the Human Resource Development International in 4:1(2001) pp 127-135 2001 entitled *A Practitioner's reflections on facilitating organisational development in South African organisations*. I thought you all would like to read an extract to hear Ruth's own voice, words and wisdom.

This interview seeks to find some understanding of what a practitioner experienced in South African organisations during the transition towards a democratic country.

In 2010 this is still valid in wisdom and sentiment.

**LM:** What made you move into organisation development?

**Ruth de Bruyn:** Ruth de Bruyn: It is quite a funny story – it happened almost by default. I spent 18 years in professional social work prior to starting a training and consultancy business in 1987. As a social worker, I had headed a family relationships organization in Johannesburg for eight years. I was steeped in a systemic way of thinking and had experienced family therapy techniques such as circular questioning, looking for themes when analyzing a complex web of relationships and structures and not taking sides in conflict situations. After about seven years of doing primarily training, covering areas such as stress management, assertiveness and team building, I found that I was being drawn more into facilitation of strategic thinking and planning, and into mediation in team or executive conflicts. A fundamental principle of therapy is that you use yourself as a tool in the relationship with your client in order for them to take responsibility for resolving the difficulties they are grappling with. I used this approach in the companies where I worked.



Francoise Breuer, Pat Novak, Annet de Jong and Ruth after the Mexico conference



Lily Mitchell and Ruth outside the Bolshoi Ballet, during Russia conference

Well, in 1997 a colleague of mine (Mervyn Davidowitz) invited me to attend the International Organisation Development Association (IODA) conference in Hungary. He persuaded me to run a workshop jointly with him on the changes being experienced by South African businesses during our transition from the apartheid era to a democratic way of being as a country. At this IODA Conference at Lake Ballaton I found a sizeable proportion of the 250 people from some 26 countries using similar methods to mine. OD has a low profile generally in South Africa. So it was quite a surprise to find a body of people in Hungary confidently placing themselves within a discipline called Organisation Development. I guess I had found my pack at this IODA Conference. Having links with this international group of people means a great deal to me now, especially after the years of international isolation that South Africa experienced.

**LM:** *Now that South Africa is back in the global market, do you deal with foreign companies?*

**Ruth de Bruyn:** In the South African subsidiary of a Swedish corporation I was called in after the horse had bolted, so to speak. A change process had been initiated by the MD, which resulted in moving some of the previous management out of the inner circle of power. There was rage and hurt among the management team. The MD was asked to meet me to look at damage control. After interviewing the whole management team individually and in some depth, I asked the MD whether she would be willing to have one-on-one sessions facilitated by me with each of the four displaced managers on what they perceived as their alienation from her. She had the courage to do this, which was almost pure therapy and reconciliation. Everyone concerned was called on to face their own intrapersonal history where it was impacting on work relationships and productivity.

**LM:** *This must have taken an unusual amount of trust from the participants that the session would be safe?*

**Ruth de Bruyn:** Yes I think that management relationships had broken down to such a degree, and there was so much sadness and anger about, that it was preferable for them to go through this process than to remain with the status quo. Through the individual interviews they had built up some trust in me. They called me 'Dr Ruth', and at my second round of interviews one of the most vulnerable managers drew a cartoon of me standing over them looking into their heads with a magnifying glass which he put on the door of my interview room. We all rolled about with laughter together, him included, and perhaps that was a turning point. They were testing to see whether I could take the joke. I did look rather witch-like in the cartoon, but it was really very funny, "Dr Ruth" is of course a sex expert, which I knew from marriage counselling days and from sex therapy training I had done in Florida, USA.

You have highlighted something of great value to me, Lily with your question on trust. Some trust in me is usually already established at my entry level into the company. Most of the time, I am approached because of word-of-mouth referral. I find trust to be an essential human resource and OD tool, especially as people and teams usually feel quite vulnerable by the time I am called in. Leaders may feel they have failed, or are at least under attack, teams and middle managers may feel they have let the company down. At times, when there is heated criticism of leadership, I feel I am walking a tightrope. I have to keep the trust of leadership or my intervention is dead in the water, and yet I have to reflect the criticism back to them or there is little point in my involvement. This is where an independent outsider who is not enmeshed in the power relations of the organisation can sometimes unblock and move things forward in a way that is almost impossible to do from within.

**LM:** *Can you say more about how South Africa is dealing with the transformation of society as you see it?*

**Ruth de Bruyn:** The important thing is to let go of some things and embrace new things.

**LM:** *What kind of new things?*

**Ruth de Bruyn:** We need to work in a multicultural society. Previously the white males, who were in total control and ensured that was the case, set the rules. Now we have to work in an African society that is particularly respectful but has customs very different from a Western Anglo-Saxon one. Even how we greet each other is important. One of the black philosophies of greeting is contained in the Zulu phrase *Sawubona* – ‘Because I see you, I am’. I greet you and therefore we both exist. We exchange news and information. To skip this part of social interaction and jump directly into instructions is incredibly rude from an African perspective. Also, the democratic constitution has empowered people to speak out. Black people speak out, women speak out, and young technologically-skilled people speak out. The days of ‘pale males’ ruling the roost, and sweeping dissent under the carpet, are gone. Managers now need to sharpen their capacity for understanding the concerns of their people, and to advocate their views up the line. We need to take the expectations of black people to be in senior positions into account – particularly the African National Congress government has now been in power for six years. The affirmative action programmes have had dubious success, but it is essential that a way be found to give people the opportunity to successfully reach their aspirations.

**LM:** *What specifically can you do to facilitate change?*

**Ruth de Bruyn:** Continual communication about the change process is a major and commonly overlooked part of transformation. People need to feel part of the change process and take ownership of it or they sabotage it either actively or passively. I see my role as a facilitator of communication in organisations. It is an array of opportunities and levels of culture in both the third and the first world

## In memory of IODA member Noble (2) Amewudah by Gloria Sarku from Ghana



### NOBLE 2 - “I BLAZED A TRAIL .....”

No music can best describe the passage of your life tale

Ordinarily, we seem aloft, like a ship without a sail

Bringing most of yourself to bear- anchored firmly- but alas, you have left us

Leaving profound thoughts, wishes, regrets, reflections, all amiss and within us

Endlessly wishing we could draw back the hands of time, Oh Noble 2, with such a grip

2 heads, one mind, one goal, one vision – the OD Program- OCIC-UCC Partnership!

Your smile, your grace, your poise, your exposure

You stood tall, clamoring over all doubts of distraction or failure

You brought your experience to bear, you held the Partnership together

You oiled and greased, you simply kept the OD fire burning ayonder

Words cannot say how you are missed and how much pain we bear too

We wish you a safe passage, May your soul rest in perfect peace, Noble 2!

Fondly remembered by colleagues, friends and participants on the OD Program!

## Partnership Development and Management in Nigeria

Ibidunni Adeniyi,  
OD consultant Nigeria



The Management Strategies for Africa (MSA) is an indigenous not for profit African social enterprise, dedicated to capacity building for African development especially in the health sector. It focuses on institutional, organizational and management capacity building with emphasis on Sexual and Reproductive Health and HIV/AIDS organization.

Management Strategies for Africa is a strong advocate of partnership. With support from the Packard and MacArthur Foundations, it has been able to promote, encourage and support partnership initiatives at the micro level. Partnership development and management is an area which is fast emerging in for profit and not for profit organizations. However, it is not known whether any attempt has been made to conduct any surveys in partnership development (especially in Nigeria). Neither is it known whether there has been dissemination of the findings, if any, to aid learning and application. Consequently, with the funding support of the Lucille and David Packard Foundation, MSA under its Organization Effectiveness Project designed and conducted a survey on partnership amongst health development organizations, focusing on the not for profit sector and donors as MSA's contribution to the body of knowledge within the sector.

Indeed partnership is deemed important for global well being, and to this extent is goal 8 of the millennium development goals. Nigeria, in the last one and a half decades, as in other parts of the world, there has been a radical shift by donors from funding single organizations to providing funding support to consortia of organizations to design and manage projects in the health sector, including reproductive health and HIV/AIDS.

The specific objectives of the survey were:

1. To examine and document key factors in partnership development
2. To determine what has worked or not worked in partnership development
3. To identify and document best practices in partnership development
4. To recommend innovative strategies to improve partnership development

The survey, which sought to scientifically establish, document and disseminate the rationale, approaches, experiences and lessons in partnership development amongst various actors in health development has some of the following key findings on best practices:

- **Partnership must be for a purpose, with a guiding MoU, consideration of sustainability; setting clear goals and bearing in mind all partners' competencies.**
- **There must be trust and mutual respect between partners, team work is the best, which uses consensus building, involvement and commitment.**
- **Good communication and effective feedback, enhances partnership, and regular meetings and information sharing helps build trust.**
- **On strategies that do not work in partnerships, it is apparent that:**
- **Donor led and funded alliance does not work in the Nigerian setting due to the fact that the life span of the project is tied to donor funding and often is not sustainable**
- **Over-formalizing the partnership through legal arrangements which is often seen as inflexible**
- **Not negotiating the terms of partnership**

In conclusion, this publication has contributed inputs into facilitating and hindering factors, best practices to date in terms of processes and procedures and communication approaches, one important step in the way forward to strengthen partnership is strengthening the basis of and mechanisms for partnership and focusing on strategic considerations.

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## A report from OD Network (ODN) as an international friend of IODA

Ken Nishikawa, Japan



We sincerely introduce all IODA members and our activities that we have done up to now.

First, OD Network Japan started on February 7, 2010. Two years ago, some people who were interested in OD discussed together the necessities for the OD community in Japan. More people than the first group began to draft the charter of the ODNJ and checked it again and again. All dedications finally were orchestrated into founding ODNJ. On the day, thirteen founders of ODNJ came together to a small room in Tokyo to declare the first day of ODNJ activity. On February 12, the division of Legal Affairs Bureau in Japan accepted ODNJ as a formal community. It's the end of the beginning.



First meeting of ODN Japan conducted by Ken Nishikawa

Second, ODNJ held the first Annual Conference in Tokyo on May 15. Over fifty people came to share time and talking about OD for almost half a day. Main theme and the program of the conference was the following: "Future that OD creates. - Be true to self between reflection and participation."

In the first part of the conference, Ken Nishikawa gave a short lecture that described the framework of OD. Afterwards, the Director of Administration of ODNJ, Takashi Oshima, also gave a brief lecture about OD values. In the second part of it, after Check In!!l, five or six groups having three or four people started to share their own experience about Democracy in the workplace in Japan and discussed struggling to achieve balance between Democracy and Japanese subtle business culture. People moved around each table as "World Café" does after sufficient time had passed. Finally, the representatives of each table introduced their discussions to all attendees for a few minutes, and then, we all reflected our activities during the first conference of ODNJ with respect to reflection and participation.



Third, on June 12, we started a meeting for sharing OD knowledge with prospective and registered members of ODNJ. Because we got happy responses from many at the first conference of ODNJ, we decided to run another regular meeting for the member of ODNJ as well as non-registered but prospective members of us. Over twenty people came to a small conference room in Tokyo on that day, and had an interesting time under the same manner of the first conference. In the first half of the meeting, Ken introduced the concept of OD process based on the textbook and the case; Seagram written by Todd D. Jick (2000). In the latter half, all attendees shared the experience and idea about change process in their workplace based on the discussions of the case: Seagram.

I hope our tiny efforts will encourage people to learn more about OD; in addition, OD will get more appreciation from clients, practitioners, and academics in Japan.

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## Action research for organizational change: Why and how an NGO survives its growth crisis?

Moussiliou Alidou  
OD consultant, Benin



GRAPAD – ONG is a Beninese NGO created in 1990 at the beginning of the democratic era. It is composed of agronomists who were all classmates, from various disciplines and it intervenes in rural development. The organization undertook an internal change process after about eight to nine years, which resulted in a stronger, professional organization which is involved in significant great events of civil society in Benin. Today, it is one of the few viable NGOs in Benin. I followed from a distance its process of change when I worked with a capacity building NGO that partnered with GRAPAD. As an OD consultant interested in organization change, I asked the members of the NGO to write an article on the initiative of change in the local NGO because at that time in Benin it was an innovative action. It was the first time a local NGO had taken the initiative to undertake institutional reform which would enable it to adapt to the internal and external needs.

### The rationale of the organizational change

The change process, was a continuous learning process where members questioned and learned from the organization course. They frequently sat down to dialogue and identified solutions to new challenges. Even now the new systems and structures are still being improved upon.

The decision to undertake this change process was the consequence of the growth of individual members. One of the members testified as follows: *'After working together for a while as classmates, we faced the challenges of reconciling two realities: that of 'student life' without real challenging relationships, and that of 'active life' characterized by the thirst of self-realization with individual interests and various personalities.'*

At the organization level, they wanted to serve as a model of good governance in civil society and they wanted to improve the image of their NGO where partners are concerned. Their image has suffered because they had taken on too many development projects and combined this with providing consultancy services. They were not focused. The challenge is nicely put here by the members:

*"We started the NGO with researches and consultancy services which enabled us to get means to cover administrative costs. We progressively combined this with development activities. So, it came a time, when the number, the range and the scales of our activities were increasing: we were running many projects with lot of staff and our expenses grew. The NGO was intervening in various sectors with 80 staff, 20 partners, etc. Consequently managing all of these required more time and resources from us and any additional project or partnership became a challenge in terms of recruitment and the additional work of supervising and coordinating. In addition, partners were questioning if our organization is a consultancy firm or a development NGO and that started affecting us despite our expertise. In fact, there was stiff competition amongst the huge number of NGOs, complicated by issues of corruption and patronage. So we thought it was time to question our effectiveness and to revisit our organization and to reposition it. It was necessary for us to be focused in a few areas where we have real added value."*

### How did the process go?

The process was an action research undertaken by GRAPAD-ONG because members were constantly questioning the situation. In the beginning it was like jumping into an unknown situation. There was uncertainty. In fact, except for God, none of them knew what the result of such a process could be. Everyone had his own expectation and idea about what the change should be but they tried to agree on common challenges and a vision about the change.

*"We wanted to become a professional organization and to be distinguished among the plethora of NGOs. That is why we needed a profound change and we started with some assumptions and we tried to list down the potential risks and how to manage them. It was a participatory planning that we called GRAPAD's institutional itinerary chart that reconciled individual needs with collective objective. All these ideas about the change were compiled in a nice document. Knowing that the first assumptions could also lead to other assumptions, we decided to be quite flexible; that is why the duration of the process was two to three times longer than what has been foreseen."*

They all have professional expertise and management skills. Each of them could manage alone. So they decided to decentralize with sufficient autonomy. They were all aware that their biggest challenge was to stay as one organization because most NGOs do not survive to their growth crisis and break into small, non-viable organizations. They had to preserve the image of the NGO and remove doubt from the minds of partners about the status of the NGO, as well as build on the initial friendship they had built over the years.

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They frequently met and shared ideas and feelings about the process. External resource persons were also asked to reflect on the reform. Even though it was an indigenous initiative, it was carried out with assistance from partners. Most of their partners provided moral support, although they expected financial support which they did not get.

As result of this process, three autonomous departments were created:

- One for supporting microfinance systems at grassroots level. This is to function in conformity with the West African law on microfinance.
- The second one for supporting sustainable management of the environment and it took over the development activities of the NGO;
- The third one was devoted to research, training and consulting where members were expected to sell their expertise to earn fees.

An administration and finance unit was to support these three operational departments. Each of these four units was led by a manager chosen by consensus. The managers formed the administrative council of the NGO. This council would meet regularly and implement the decisions reached in respect of each department. The remaining staff and members were divided among the four units accordingly.

### Lessons learned

The members of GRAPAD-ONG pointed out many lessons from their change experience. Just like a human being, an organization is born, grows and matures then starts to decline. To stay alive and relevant it should continuously be strategic, reflect, make an internal assessment and scan its environment, consequently repositioning itself every three years. Otherwise, the organization will age in a changing world. Things are changing so quickly that if you cannot adapt as quickly, you cannot effectively compete.

In that case, managers have to use tools to continuously assess their organizations response to the demand of its environment and what the new challenges are. If you do not plan for change, change will surprise you.

*" Our NGO intervenes in rural development where knowledge, methods and approaches to work are not fixed and new challenges appear. But our NGO was there for 20 years. We were able to adapt to change. We took advantage of opportunities to develop new competencies and skills."*

Besides they learned that for change to be successful, it is important to care about values, behaviors, group dynamics and team spirit. They learned everything that helps a group to be sustainable instead of dying. People in the organization must have common objectives, common agreements on how to achieve this, function as a team, and learn from their experiences.

*"We also learned that achieving group objective should go together with individual ones. If you focus too much on one and you forget or minimize the other, crisis will occur frequently and repeatedly. That should be the secret of a learning organization. If the organization develops without individuals, it will die. And it is the same if some individuals grow without the organization."*

In a team, each person has a valuable role to play according to his/her predispositions and strengths. But it is not an unmovable role; they also have to learn to play role of others. *"We assigned roles according to individual capacities and predispositions."* It is also important for a manager to know how to motivate people and reinforce their self confidence. Support them to tackle new challenges according to their potential in their new position. They have to make an effort to let everyone express his personal objective and help everyone achieve it. *"This process revealed to me a lot of competencies I had but that I ignored."*

During an organizational change, it's important to communicate and to promote dialogue--positive, honest communication, not based on prejudice. *"We communicated and communicated and we really listened to each other and shared our feelings and cared about our emotions. If you are in change, don't leave space for frustration because once it comes, it grows and becomes bigger and bigger and generates conflict."*

It is important, from time to time, to open the door to external people to feel the change and to criticize and help reflect on it. It is also important to communicate externally with partners and to collect their feedback on how they feel the change. Finally celebrating successes, even small ones is important during change as a leader of the NGO confessed:

*"I learned that it is important to combine business and pleasure. We have worked too much together, but unfortunately, we did not celebrate enough. That would have fortified and reinforced our relationships. We were highly committed and we made a huge sacrifice. We could have managed that differently and the result of our change process could have been different and better."*

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## The Cost of Cultural Insensitivity and/or Ignorance: *We Had Better Figure This Out. .*

John J. Scherer, Poland

I remember the moment vividly. 1972. Sitting in a circle of Native American men and women elders from The Cayuga in upstate New York, supposedly conducting a workshop on 'Conflict and Communications' – a training topic I thought I knew something about.



At one point, I had put people into trios to practice one of the fundamental skills of interpersonal interaction: active listening. Person A was to speak to one of their trio members (Person B) about a topic of importance to them, while the listener (Person B) practiced the skills I had just described to the whole group. The third trio member, (Person C) was to serve as an observer and offer feedback later on. The active listening skills I wanted Person B to put into action:

- Make strong eye contact
- Turn toward the person, concentrating on nothing but them
- Open your hands and your attitude
- Paraphrase what you heard the person saying frequently, so the other person knows you are 'getting' what they are saying.
- Ask questions and actively participate, responding in the 'blank' spaces, so the other person sees that you are interested and engaged with them.

But meanwhile, back at the workshop:

As the five-minute exercise unfolded, I noticed people squirming uncomfortably in their trios, looking down at the floor, avoiding eye contact, seemingly not interested in what was happening. At the end of the time, I reflected back to the group what I had seen and heard and asked what was going on. No one would look at me. They seemed embarrassed and uncomfortable. Not knowing what else to do, like every alert facilitator, I called a short break.

### **When in doubt, gather data. . .**

Out in the hall, I sought out my client, a 30-something elder who had invited me in to help the leadership council deal with their conflicts.

'What's going on?' I asked him.

'Well, John. . .' He didn't want to say anything.

'Come on, Tom, what's happening?! Are they not interested? Are they resisting? Is this too advanced or something? Talk to me, please. . .'

'OK. Here it is in a nutshell, John. Our ways are not your ways. . .'

'Jeez, I know that! But communication is communication, isn't it? I mean listening is listening. I'm just showing people the way to listen *better*.'

'Actually, no. You are showing us how the white man listens better. We don't do it that way. It's almost the opposite. But you have come to us to help us. You honor us by your presence. They like you; I can tell. No one wants to disrespect you or dishonor you by openly disagreeing with your instructions. They will respectfully *try* to do an exercise like this, but not really. That way they don't make you look foolish or wrong.'

'Sure,' he replied.

'Got it!' I said, surprised but relieved to have it out on the table where maybe something could be done. 'I know what to do next. May I quote our conversation?'

Gathering after the break, I shared the conversation with the group and asked them if that was accurate. Many heads nodded affirmatively and I took that as a Yes.

'I apologize to you,' I started out. 'I have obviously done what white people have done for centuries: imposed our way of doing something on you. Please forgive me.'

People looked up at me and I sensed a growing engagement happening.

'Will you help me? Perhaps we can all learn something about communication from what happened. First, let me ask you a question: Can YOU tell the difference between 'good listeners and 'not-so-good listeners' in your community?'

Many heads nodded, many people chuckled, shaking their heads.

'How do you tell the difference? What are the 'good listeners doing? How would you coach me to be a good listener in your way of doing it? What should I do and not do? Tell me, teach me!'

### 'The Good (Cayuga) Listener'

There was a long pause. People looked at each other. They looked at Tom. I could have sworn he nodded in a kind of signal: 'It's OK.'

Then they started educating *me*—and, as it turned out, reinforcing for *themselves* what good communication looked like for them:

- "The best listeners do not stare the other person in the eye. That violates their space. It is an invasion of their private world. They may occasionally glance at the person to stay in contact, but that's it."
- "They don't turn toward the other person in a strong manner either; that implies threat. They usually sit or stand *beside* the person, not directly in front of them."
- "The one about having open arms or hands and an open attitude—that one works!"
- "But this thing of paraphrasing, we just don't get it! Why should we repeat what we just heard? That feels disrespectful to us?" (In response, I told them about being on the bridge of my ship in the Navy and having to repeat orders back to ensure accuracy. Then I asked them, 'How do you know the other person heard you accurately?' Someone said, 'They just look you in the eye briefly and nod. That says 'I got it.' 'Well what if they didn't get it? What happens then?' I asked. 'Well, then we go on from there.' *They seemed incredulous that being accurate all the time was more important than respect. . .*)
- "Then this business of asking questions all the time, even interrupting, interjecting your comments into what the other person is saying—that's just plain *rude!*"

"OK, I get what NOT to do, I think. What do your best listeners DO?"

"Oh, they just listen from the heart, then all the other 'skill' stuff just happens naturally. That's why we were willing to listen to *you*. At the first break in the morning we were talking about you in the hall and we decided that you were coming to us from the heart. That made it OK that you were teaching us things that wouldn't work for us. We thought, 'He's a good man. He's not here to change us or fix us or save us. Let's see what we can learn from him.'"

Grateful and humbled, I thanked them, and realized that they had given me a life-changing lesson. As you can tell, I have not forgotten that moment in 1972 with the Cayuga elders.

Fast forward to the present.

Part of my personal and professional development includes participating in something called ODNet, an internet-based community of some 2,000 men and women Organization Development (OD) consultants from around the world who do the same kind of work I do. Recently, there has been a flurry of high interest postings on "How do we work in a global context, where a team of managers is likely to have members from several different countries—and cultures?"



### The Situation

As the history of our field unfolded, most of our “OD ancestors” were white males from America and Western Europe, people like Frederick Taylor, Kurt Lewin, Wilfred Bion, Ken Benne, Warren Bennis, Ed Schein, Herb Shepard, Dick Bechard, Ron Lippitt and others. Some well-known change and facilitation models developed by these amazing pioneers DO work in non-Western cultures, but many do NOT. (The story above is just one example.)



Kurt Lewin, extraordinary German-born “Grandfather” of the field of applied behavioral science, and prolific thinker on how people change.

### The Problem/Opportunity

As you “do OD” or lead a change process, or even just attempt to manage people, until you step back, “see” and deeply understand, your own cultural biases, you don’t have a culture, *your culture has you*. This means your clients or staff are forced to “fit” into those conceptual models and processes - or not. The results can be - and usually are - less than optimal for the client/staff members, and embarrassing to you, the OD consultant/manager/ leader. *I believe we are either going to learn how to live and work with each other or some truly bad things are going to happen.* The data is all around us.

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## Virtual International Teams (VIT): Applied research to increase efficiency in globally acting companies

Dr. Marion Keil  
OD consultant, Germany



Most of today's international business life is handled in a virtual manner. In call centers, project and management teams, departments and interface teams, people are working together without being physically in touch and, very often, without even knowing each other.

We noticed during our consulting work, that many virtual teams, noticeably, international virtual teams (VIT), face particular challenges. We wanted to explore these challenges further by conducting in-depth qualitative research. With this research we aim to develop helpful tools to assist working virtual teams and hope to make their lives easier in future.

### Research Design and Sample

We developed a qualitative question guideline, based on some pre-assumptions derived from our consulting work with virtual international teams. Five companies agreed to participate in this research. They represent various industries like banking, IT/ telecommunications /infrastructure, production, the chemical industry and commerce. We interviewed six teams of 12 to 23 members. The criterion for inclusion in the research was that team members should be located in different countries sharing a common task.

The interviews were conducted by worldwide phone calls. Then we defined assumptions and drew conclusions about the prominent behaviour patterns within each team. The individual results were kept confidential. Each virtual team received their result either face-to-face or in a virtual session. Then we looked at the overall result and again identified main findings and patterns, which are detailed here.

### Goals

Goals tend to be highly relevant binding forces for virtual international teams. We found out that in most cases the team members were able to clearly state their individual goals, however, mostly the teams were not often aware of clear, measurable – SMART! – common team goals. Team members faced an individualisation and regionalisation effect as the substitute for missing team goals. VITs are extremely dependent on information, even more than face-to-face teams. The latter satisfy their information needs in meetings; informal information exchanges occur quickly and in situatively. We found out that in most cases there were few clearly communicated rules in place about how to deal with information – neither from the management down to the team members, nor from the team members out to other team members or other teams. There was in most cases a constant feeling of not getting all the relevant information, despite an overwhelming amount of information distributed by email through “cc copies” to a wide and more or less indiscriminately selected audience. Political dynamics in virtual organisations and teams were also noticeable by the wide use of “bcc-blind carbon copy.”

### Technology

As the word virtual already implies, technology plays a big role in virtual team work. We found out that astonishingly few teams used technology in an innovative way according to the needs of the virtual team or task. Very often the virtual international teams work with a poor technological infrastructure (bad phone lines, limited conference call facilities, few video conferences etc).

### Cultural Diversity

Virtual international teams are a common reality in business life today. Most global businesses are run by teams whose members do not work together face-to-face, are situated in different countries and have various national (cultural and linguistic) backgrounds. We found out that working in a virtual international team is perceived as being fascinating – like being part of a global community. The majority of interviewees have not been trained in how remote teams can be organized efficiently or how culturally diverse members of a remote team can best be addressed and worked with. How team members deal with time, with conflict or feedback; how they communicate or what they expect from their leader – everything was subconsciously influenced by the different cultures. On the flipside the topic of cultural diversity tended to be matched by the catchword “professionalism” – working in a remote international team requiring specific so-called —professional values and norms. These were assumed to be valid and applicable to everybody, but not agreed upon. “Culture” is perceived as a synonym for emotional, uncontrolled behavior – and hence “unprofessional” – in the fact— and figure-based business world. Team members feel very unsure about how to deal with emotions (based on different values in the workplace).

### Trust

How trust can be created and fostered in a virtual international team turned out to be one of the most challenging tasks. We found that the virtual international teams operated at a fairly low level of team trust. Trust existed in bilateral, one-to-one relationships, where one could rely on experiences made during real life – for example during face-to-face meetings or through previous cooperation on project work.

Trust tended to develop more easily between team members from the same cultural background/nationality, either because of similar behaviour and ways of communicating or because of the same language being used. The level of trust increases considerably when the team leader deals with the dissemination of information in an appropriate way, i.e. giving information to every team member, keeping his word, talking to all team members on a one-to-one basis, respecting each team member's cultural background and being able to deal with cultural diversity.

### Feedback

Feedback in virtual international teams needs various preconditions. We found out that in VITs, conscious feedback is given considerably less. Feedback is given on the lowest common communication ground possible. The cultural diversity with its various culturally different styles of conveying critical messages directly or indirectly seems to increase the complexity of communication. There seems to be a high risk for the person wanting to give a feedback of not being able to make the point and keep the appropriate tone/style for the feedback receiver. As a result, very little or no feedback is given in a virtual situation.

### Identity

A virtual international team is a social entity. As such it tends to develop a specific identity. We found out that it seems to be very difficult for virtual international teams to develop a strong, binding identity, as distance, lack of personal knowledge and cultural diversity hinder an intense exchange of thoughts and the creation of a common image of the team as an entity.

A main contribution to identity building in VITs is the clear message/task and pride to know —“Why do we exist? What do we contribute? Why are we as a team unique?” The boundaries of the virtual teams seem to be quite a grey area: Who belongs to the team and what do they contribute? Who no longer belongs to the team? Who is present during conf calls and why? As the level of trust is lower, these questions are rarely asked openly.

### Conflict

In nearly all teams, whether face-to-face or virtual, conflicts are hard to address but this is especially so in VITs. We found out that, due to the lack of face-to-face communication and very often the fact that the virtual team members do not even know each other, there is clearly a tendency to avoid addressing conflicts at all. This is reinforced by the cultural patterns of those team members whose culture is to use indirect forms of communication. For most of the team members the use of English as a foreign language also doesn't encourage the addressing of an issue, especially if they are not fluent in English.

### Leadership

Leadership is crucial for every team. The more the team is in the forming stage, the more the team depends on its leader. We found out that the team leaders seem to have an understanding of the potential value added by a culturally diverse team, but were not sure about how they could tap into these resources. The leaders don't seem to be sufficiently prepared for the more challenging task of leading an international virtual team. The team leaders tend to underestimate the importance of building up relationships between the virtual international team members right at the beginning of the team's lifecycle. The team leaders tend to underestimate the importance of collective common team goals and to not invest sufficient energy and resources in team events and the communication/celebration/appreciation.

### Change

The introduction of virtual international teams and structural changes in organizations is a symptom of fast-growing globalization. We found out that working in a virtual international team amplifies prior organizational issues like unclear structures or problems in interfaces, hindrances in the flow of information, the avoidance of conflict or weaknesses in leadership. As trust is difficult to build up and nurture, such issues are rarely addressed and solved. Team efficiency is negatively affected. Whereas in —ordinaryll face-to-face teams, measures to increase team efficiency are often used, VITs have to fight hard regarding the cost of travel, even if their performance is at stake.

### Six steps to virtual success

Out of the research results we developed a process of how companies may best introduce a suitable way of working to newly formed virtual (project) teams. The importance is the process view on virtual team work. The principle is: first invest in relationship building and trust, then in supporting technology and now performance may start! Keep an eye on self-organization and knowledge sharing. Ask external stakeholders for their perception. And have face-to-face meetings a minimum of once a year to evaluate your performance, learnings and growth.

If you want to see the full material, please visit [www.synetz-international.com](http://www.synetz-international.com)



International Organization Development Association

→ [www.iodanet.org](http://www.iodanet.org)

## From the newsletter team

We would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone for their support and contributions to this issue. During our work on this piece we were following the Soccer World cup and got excited about IODA 25th birthday. We hope to see many of you in Budapest.

We are always looking for more IODA News items from members. To make a submission to the Newsletter, please email Alette Vonk: [alettevonk@yahoo.com](mailto:alettevonk@yahoo.com) or [silkehaebold@online.de](mailto:silkehaebold@online.de).

We always welcome other individuals interested in working with the newsletter team, to make sure that the newsletter content is as representative as possible concerning the activities and interests to the IODA community.

Of course we welcome any feedback that will help us to provide a great newsletter to IODA members and friends.

Sincerely,

The newsletter team

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