Title: Trainer experiences applying Diversity Icebreaker in 15 African countries.

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Abstract
Background.
Diversity Icebreaker (DI) is a training and development process developed in Norway over the last 20 years (Ekelund and Langvik, 2008, Ekelund and Pluta, 2015). It has been used in more than 50 different countries, including 15 African countries south of Sahara. Cross-cultural differences have been described from an empirical point of view using correlation studies with mapping of cultural values (Ekelund, Shneor and Gehrke, 2008) and practitioners as well as authors have suggested the process is useful and relevant for cross-cultural training (Ekelund and Maznevski, 2008, Romani, 2013, Orgeret 2014). This is the first study where data has been systematically collated from consultants that have used DI in a specific geographical region. In this study, we have gathered reports from 13 different consultants across 36 seminars that have used DI in 15 different African countries.

The evolution and description of the Diversity Icebreaker process.
Emerging from the consulting experience of Ekelund by 1996 , by combining a psychological test with an open-ended group seminar process, the Diversity Icebreaker process builds on different scientific paradigms, including psychology, sociology, linguistics and pedagogics (Ekelund, Iversen and Davcheva, 2015). This integrated multi-paradigm approach has been replicated in Diversity Icebreaker training sessions across many countries around the world.

Ekelund's company has cooperated with academic institutions to research and develop the Diversity Icebreaker questionnaire and seminar processes. This has resulted in various books and papers, (Ekelund and Langvik, 2008, Ekelund and Pluta, 2015), as well as collating the individual questionnaire results into aggregated norms for comparison purposes. This paper describes the first systematic gathering of both qualitative data and facilitators' experience with the important group processes of seminars either held in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) or with a strong representation of participants from SSA. From the perspective of continual improvement as well as identifying potential use, it is important to see what the DI

methodology can contribute towards opening up communication and understanding across the changing patterns and influence of individual and group differences in sub- Saharan Africa.

The Diversity Icebreaker Process

The Diversity Icebreaker (DI) process typically explores five different areas:

- Self-understanding and leadership development.
- Working in teams doing project work and innovation seminars,
- Cross-cultural workshops and diversity management,
- Communication and conflict management training,
- Kick-offs,

In some of the African workshops described here, it was also used as a demonstration for trainers, training managers and decision-makers, as well as practitioners in industry, academia and the public sector.

The DI questionnaire is designed to measure personal preferences for different communication, interaction and problem solving styles. It consists of 42 items with a semi-ipsative response scale that represent three cognitive dimensions, labelled Red, Blue, and Green. These identify personal preferences for focusing on people, action or ideas respectively. Validation studies have been conducted relating these three dimensions to other 'Western' based psychometric methodologies, such as the Big Five personality factors, Emotional Intelligence, Cultural Values, and Team Performance (Ekelund and Langvik, 2008). In 2013, Diversity Icebreaker received a seal of quality from DNV GL in line with European standards on psychological tests.

Diversity Icebreaker in seminars

As mentioned above, the power of the Diversity Icebreaker is not only in the relative simplicity, yet depth, of the individual questionnaire, but also in doing the joint processes that use the results. There are some simple, and effective, stages in the process, which are valuable to describe, in order to demonstrate why these processes often have the effect of positively opening up the interaction in a group.

After individually filling in the Diversity Icebreaker questionnaire, which yields a totalled number in each of the three dimensions, the participants split into three 'colour' groups according to their highest score in each dimensional category. At this moment, a facilitator can take one of two choices. One is to leave the resulting number in each group unequal, often larger blue groups than red or green. The other choice is to balance the number in each of the three groups by asking those with the nearest highest numbers in their second colour to move to that 'second' colour. In the first choice, when participants work in their 'dominant' preference groups, their descriptions of themselves are usually much more clearly defined within each of the three colour categories. When equal groups are made so that some are working in their non-dominant colours, they have to use their flexibility and access their secondary preferences. Sometimes their self-descriptions overlap other 'colours'. Even so, these participants can experience this as their first practical reflective experience of adapting to a less preferred norm and way of going about things.
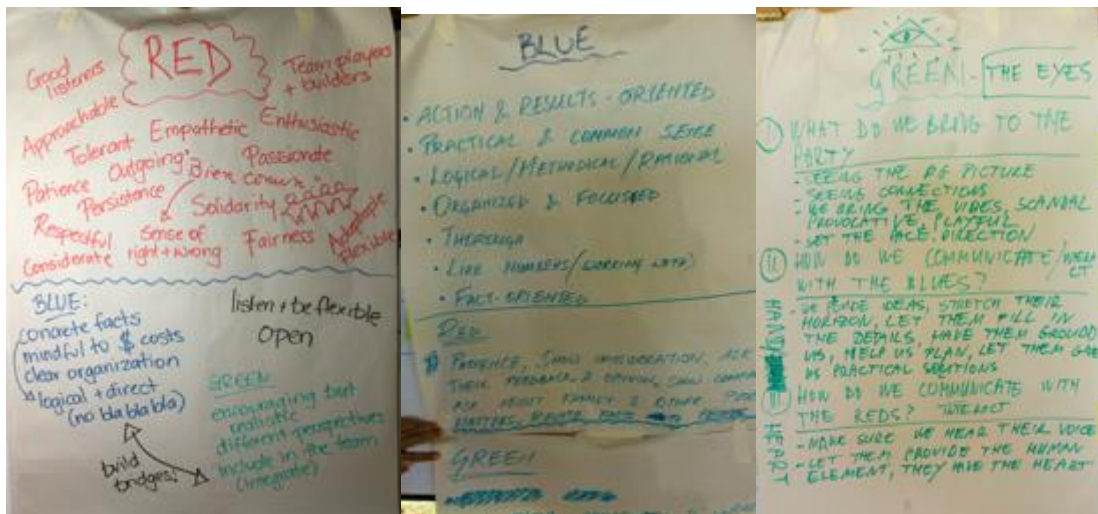
When the groups are set either way, they are given two questions to answer:

- "What are the qualities of your own colour when you interact with others?" or "What is awesome about being your colour?"

And
- "What are the qualities of the two other colour groups when they interact with the each of the other two groups?

Examples of flipcharts are:

In this case, illustrated above, the second question was 'How can you best interact with the others?' This case illustrates that even the style of writing the flipcharts can often reflect the primary norms. The blue points are bulleted and concise, the reds are drawing people holding hands and the greens seeing themselves as those able to see the overview, 'the eyes'. In another workshop in Kenya, the blues did straight bullet points describing themselves as practical, concrete, direct, solution oriented, organised, time-conscious, evidence based, like numbers, grounded, perfectionists, like structure and more. The 'reds' encircled their passionate, caring, people oriented, outgoing, very warm, show feelings, considerate, patient, humane (and more) self description with a large heart. The 'greens', … having quoted John Lennon 'You may say I am a dreamer….' saw themselves as determining the future, liking variety, connecting the dots, experimental, adventurous, flexible able to create new opportunities, high goals, think outside the box and more.

Over time, various questions have been tried out, asking about each group's good sides and 'bad' sides, the challenges faced by each group, each group's unique contribution, etc. No matter which specific questions are asked, it seems that the processes in the groups are very similar. The groups form an identity and create an in-group positive feeling as they describe themselves and list their characteristics on a flip chart, often focusing first on their positive aspects. This often goes on until someone says "Well, we have some negative sides here, too", or the facilitator has prompted them to also add in what others may find challenging when engaging with them. As they write down the qualities of the other colour groups, as with describing themselves, they are often amused and can seem slightly embarrassed, especially when they suggest negative characters of the others. They often create a distinct, yet light-hearted in-group / out-group feeling.

The groups then share in plenary:-

- "What have you written about your self?"
- "What have you written about the others?"

In answering these in plenary, the groups need to change between reflecting on themselves, to also trusting to be open about their perceptions of others' and sharing them. (Using both actor and observer perspectives (Jones and Nisbett, 1971)) By doing so, participants become aware

of how the concepts of Red, Blue and Green are perceived from an inner and outer perspective by themselves and others. Added to that, they experience their feeling of cohesion in the in-group, and how easy and fun it is to be together with people similar to themselves.

Once participants are comfortable and aware of their own and the other group's characteristics, the facilitator can begin to explore the different aspects of diversity that the group seems to be interested in or are particularly relevant to the overall context of the seminar. These can include:-

- acceptance of individual preferences,
- addressing communication challenges,
- how they position themselves within the broader team and organisation
- the relevance of bringing forward their own competences as part of a diverse group,
- the division of roles and rules in different stages of the business processes,
- cross cultural differences, perceptions and resulting interaction.

Most trainers do not stop the collective reflection until the communication ends out in a conclusion that it is ok to be different, as long as the other accepts and positively acknowledges and utilizes their qualities. In order to reduce prejudices we have seen that shared positive experiences inside groups of same colours are reported as having a bridge-builder effect. It seems that we highlight a new deep level 'fault-line' (Lau and Murnighan, 1998) , though a positive and functional 'fault-line', that breaks down the negative effect of established surface level diversity.

Following the sharing in between the groups, a learning process with collective reflection (level II in Argyris' terminology (Argyris, 1998)) is triggered with the question:

"What have you learned between the time you started filling the questionnaire and what you have now just shared and listened to?"

Some answers in sub-Saharan Africa to this question have been: "It is nice working among equals"; "Appreciate you need each other and the difference each brings"; "We need all the colours in a team", "Be aware of your environment as that affects your interaction "; "I am so surprised I am blue as I am sure I was red, is it possible that the organisational culture has influenced me? ";' 'What do we do when one colour is so predominant in this organisation?' All these comments are then acknowledged by the facilitator and commented upon based on the goals, objectives and theory of the training session, and the participants' level of engagement and interest.

The impact of the group processes

While the self-reflection created by filling in the questionnaire and then sharing the results is important in the use of Diversity Icebreaker, it is the subsequent group processes that create the most change the group dynamics, in particular sharing self-reflection and giving each other feedback. In seminars in general, and in particular in those dealing with diversity issues, trainers aim to reduce prejudices, creating a reciprocal acknowledgement of diverse qualities and at the same time creating a positive cohesion and commitment. A central component is that relevant diversity is not to be hidden, but rather positively acknowledged and utilized. In order to create reciprocal acknowledgement, the process of sharing qualities in-between groups of red, blue and green, is central, as well as the collective reflection following this exchange.

Acceptable ways of giving and receiving constructive feedback is one of the most culturally, as well as hierarchically, sensitive work activities. There are very different cultural norms around whether or not you can constructively give feedback to your superiors, in private or in public. Giving and receiving one on one constructive feedback is not a traditionally embedded activity in many organisations in sub-Saharan Africa. It is being learned, and especially corrective feedback, is mostly preferred to be given in private. Creating a 'safe' experience of doing this in a group and the outcome ending in good humour and positive emotions can be a new experience for many participants. An experience that often seems to free up the ability to be more open on other issues. Facilitators have also often seen participants to using the red, blue and green 'labels' in a relatively easy and often light-hearted manner long after the end of the process as if a good natured shared understanding of individual differences has been created.

It seems the DI processes generate an understanding of differences through interacting with others, using in-group/ out-group processes and illustrating how prejudices and stereotyping can polarize interaction and lead to questions about identity. They also quickly elicit flexible behaviour and an appreciation that we all need each other. They emphasize that it is okay that we are different so long as individual qualities are positively acknowledged and optimally utilized in interactions. The DI processes are experientially based and create humorous situations that facilitate openness and self-reflection.

Overall Methodology for collating the feedback from sub-Saharan Africa.

Facilitators who had used Diversity Icebreaker in workshops in sub-Saharan Africa were given the following guidelines to describe their experiences:

- Describe the context, purpose, target groups, composition of the participants, location, use of Diversity Icebreaker in the program,
- Describe any surprising learning points that might indicate cultural differences, from you as a consultant, comments from the participants, results on scores or on the flipcharts or other experiences or reflections[1]

Methodology for gathering data.

Based on the written reports of seminars that took place in sub-Saharan Africa from 2008 to 2015, 13 facilitators that covered all known Diversity Icebreaker seminars in sub-Saharan Africa received the written interview guide and they all responded between April to June 2015, sometimes including their co-facilitators' perceptions. A first draft of analysis was sent to those who answered at the beginning of June 2015 for comments and revisions were made, following the feedback.

Qualitative feedback and learning.

The workshops were held in 15 African countries, with one held in Ecuador with an African based UN group. The sub-Saharan African countries were; Angola, Burundi, DR Congo, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Liberia, Mali, Malawi, Nigeria, South Africa, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia.

Of the 13 different consultants who have shared their experience and feedback, one is ethnically from Africa, another has lived there for 20 years and the rest came into Africa to

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[1] The full interview guide is attached as appendix 1.

run the workshops, mostly from Europe and USA. The feedback is based on approximately 1063 registered participants, and the seminar group sizes ranged from 10 to 140 participants. Most workshops were a mix of genders, some almost balanced, with 2 workshops consisting of only females.

The main purpose of seminars where DI was included.

In ranked order, the main functions for the use of Diversity Icebreaker in workshop in sub-Saharan Africa were:

- Workshops where the intention was to make an organizational review and create future plans to be followed up
- Creating a positive and involving experience to promote interaction
- Training in self-awareness and communication
- Business training of leaders, strategy and decision-making.
- Demonstration for trainers

Specific Descriptions from the facilitator's included:-

"The HR Department at Head Office is prioritising initiatives to raise the standard and uniformity of HR management globally, towards even more empowered and engaged employees, as well as committed leadership."

"To create HR administration and management routines at the level of global best practice while creating realistic and ambitious objectives for departments and employees.

To assist line managers are comfortable with using the Performance and Development Review system tools and methods to ensure follow-up of results on an organisational and individual level,"

"We used Diversity Icebreaker as an introduction program to promote development thinking, methodology and tools in a mixed group of nationals and Norwegian representative."

"To create a common vocabulary for 3 groups across organizations. Focus on communication and the power of any type of diversity with very mixed nationalities."

…."to use the positive motivation after the seminar to select the most important project and timeline with a small group of internationals and the main group from the local country. Use the positive atmosphere to be more precise concerning goals."

"This was a classic Diversity Icebreaker seminar and after that group work to select most important project and set a realistic timeline….the main goals and priorities in our work. Most of all to create a closer relationship with the mission leader group and add some motivation and direction for mission itself"

"Develop a strategy, log frame and action plan"

"..building a shared value chain, jointly identify opportunities and key issues."

The organisations or mix of organisations

25 out of the 35 seminars were run in a context where an international organization worked with local or international representatives for a kind of development mission, project or aid function; refugee issues, peace-corps activities, UN supported police corps, etc. 2 were run for local businesses, 1 as a part of leadership training in international company, 2 seminars were

run to demonstrate the process for trainers, 5 seminars were run at universities as part of management training.

In the seminars, 7 of them had only participants that were recruited from the local national/ethnic group. 20 of the seminars had mainly locals with a small group of international representatives from the parent or other organisations. 5 of the seminars had a large mix of people across many countries mainly African countries. 3 of the seminars were business organisations with a mixture of different national backgrounds.

Reported positive effects

Diversity Icebreaker was usually used early in a larger programme in order to create a positive group experience and openness for further interaction.

To quote facilitators: -

"The short input of DI sets the atmosphere for allowing the facilitator to enter in a small amount of self reflection and, most importantly, get an amicable agreement from this group that whatever their deeper underlying differences about the approach of the overall project as a whole, they would act as one collaborative team during the 2 day workshop and not criticise each other".

"I would have had the DI session before we started the organisational review settings. When we did, I am sure it influenced the whole atmosphere for the rest of week as well as the working environment. It also improved some people´s perception of one of the leaders that they had been having trouble with. This leader showed self-irony and humour from the beginning and throughout the whole DI session, which I am sure was very important. Some commented it to me later, that they had started a new and better dialogue in the office that week. I have no doubt that their openness and humour in the DI session was a very important start here."

When it was not used as a part of a program, it was mostly used as a separate module for communication training and creating a culture of acknowledging differences.

Most of the consultants report a positive and humoristic effect, very much in line with similar experiences from consultants in Norway and other places in the world.

"After we finished they were really grateful and the director had a "Thank you" speck to salute and expressed the value UN and the seminar was important for them. They can be very formal and it's a different from what we are used to in Scandinavia. But it seemed like they really had a feeling that this was important and useful for them.

After many of them expressed more motivation and many of them used the "Red, Green, Blue button" for weeks after the seminar. They seemed proud. As a good group effect we had more of the project managers attending the weekly meeting. Sometimes they even came on time!! "

"The seminar as obligatory for everyone and some of them, especially the American staff, seemed unmotivated. The seminar turned out to be one of the most successful I had in this country. Everybody was participating and creative. One of them told me afterwards that he had attended a lot of "this kind of seminars", but this felt different for him. In a positive way! I think it was the humorous part that made him be more positive. "

Expressing negative stereotypes with self-reflective irony.

An important part of DI seminars is the humour and playfulness with negative and positive stereotypes. As one of the consultants commented as a reflection upon his experiences:

"An element of surprise to me was that in majority of cases, participants described the 'other' generally in 'negative' terms while 'self' perceptions were generally positive. Perhaps this is not unique???"

The participants are partly influenced by instructions given, and partly due to normal in-group vs out-group effects of the process itself. As mentioned above, the expression of "politically incorrect" perceptions of one self and others in a 'safe' group feedback environment, becomes an important learning point in the last stage of the seminar. This humorous and playful expression makes this training especially fit for creating awareness about these processes inside and outside the seminar (Romani, 2013, Orgeret, 2012). This open expression of stereotypes with self- and collective irony is one of aspects that differentiates this training from other more normal diversity trainings (Maznevski and Ekelund, 2008).

As some facilitators observed:-

 "Two women started teasing each other over and over again during the whole week – constantly using the colour terms; e.g. 'Now I understand why you are so'…. One was blue, the other one red."

"And well; as I use a lot of humour, irony and self-irony during my sessions, I could have experienced that they didn´t understand it or thought I was going too far due to different culture perceptions of these. But instead; they embraced it and used it themselves. I think it made them too more relaxed and that it created a better more open and better dialogue between them and made them see their colleagues and leaders in a new perspective."

"The Americans "pull the string" of going very far on the negative side. But this created a lot of fun."

Some facilitators also learned that the process works better when Diversity Icebreaker has a clear function in the program. In one case in Kenya, it was used as an after lunch icebreaker in a very content oriented workshop on Gender. The participants had come together from different organisations to use their expertise to develop content and the leader was not that interested in self-reflective processes. There was no team or group to build, so to speak, and the exercise fell very flat. Participants commented that they did not understand why they were doing it. This is in contrast to the same facilitator's experience of using it 5 or 6 times with even very large groups where it has created a very positive effect on future interaction and been greatly valued. In these positive cases, the group as a whole had a uniting broader group identity, such as belonging to the same organisation (even if geographically dispersed) or knowing that even if they came from different organisations, they needed to meld as a team to perform a specific, mutually beneficial, project task.

Further Reflections on the different categories and some cross cutting issues.

The Green category:

One of the consultants expressed in the communication that due to her experience in other cultures the participants found it more troublesome to clearly understand the Green category. Another one commented in the survey data:

"We were big groups (over 12 in each) group). Some of the greens protested loudly and felt they did not fit in. We went some rounds the settle this. One was wearing both blue and green in the end… "

The Red category:

The word "aggressive" was a part of the Red groups self description in Ghana in different seminars with post-graduate business students. The term was confirmed by the other groups, too. This is not what we have seen in other places. Why is this so? Could it be that the social dimension is more linked to authority, power and sanctions in an African context? An intriguing question that needs to be researched in another format.

About the context of authority

"You have to be prepared for unexpected things to happen. It is important to emphasize that they have to stay all the time the seminar is running. Especially it is important to get the highest leadership to attend or to give guidelines about attending the seminar. African leadership tends to be much more hierarchical than Scandinavian leadership."

On the use of humour

It is being said that use of humour is very different in different cultures. In DI seminars there are different elements that creates and promotes humour (Ekelund and Pluta 2015). One of them is the trainer, after establishing a shared understanding of the serious character of psychological testing, starts giving self-ironic comments about own expertise or the scientific tradition represented by classical test psychology. These self-ironic comments about personal and professional credibility did not create any kind of humour in 2 of the seminars where this was explicitly tested out. May be the context for making fun with expertise when coming as an expert from abroad, does not fit into a safe area of playfulness. May be this will be different for one of the local trainers.

Critical comments / suggestions for improvement.

There can be a lack of familiarity with self-scoring questionnaires in sub-Saharan Africa. Facilitators need be prepared to use more time, and help with understanding instructions and scoring, perhaps suggesting neighbours assist, especially those working in a English as a second language. It can be surprisingly difficult for some people to score and summarize in order to get 84 – even in a university context.

The Questionnaire is available on a number of languages. It may be useful to translate the tool into Kiswahili. It demonstrates linguistic sensitivity and exactitude to give participants questionnaires in their preferred languages. However, if everyone is expected to be fluent in the working language, unless you have enough same language groups, it may be good to have fluent speakers sit with those struggling to translate at the questionnaire stage, so that they have the same vocabulary when they join the larger multilingual colour groups all working in the working language.

There were clear and consistent messages from the participants in several countries that they would have answered differently in 3 settings: work environment, with families, and in their social groups (e.g. church). This maybe highlights that these environments are ' culturally ' very different

Further use of the process:

"Many expressed that applying DI is relevant to their projects, getting new people on board, awareness of different communication preferences, and the power of diversity. They see the value of having all 3 "colour" preferences, and that each person has all 3 colours in them to varying degrees."

Cross-cultural application.

The fast changing cultural realities of Sub-Saharan Africa

With over 900million people, living in 49 countries, covering 24.5million sq km, sub–Saharan Africa displays the most linguistic diversity of any region in the world with over 1000 languages (1/6th world total). Much of the linguistic and cultural diversity centres around ethnic groupings with very different traditions and ways of life. With over 50% of most national populations under 15 years of age, urbanisation is a rapid on-going cultural change across many post-independence economies (independence from British, French Portuguese and Belgian regimes 50 or more year ago) with over 500 million Africans projected to be living in urban centres by 2016. Large growing cities include Lagos, Ibadan, Accra, Johannesburg, Nairobi , Kinshasa-Brazaville and others with large informal settlements holding the transitional mass of rapid low-income urban immigration.

Much of Africa's increasing wealth is based on a yet, mostly untapped, extractive and mineral industries (rather than Industrial processing and assembly) as well as fast growth in innovative ICT and telecommunications industries. Nevertheless, income from these resources have more often been channelled into supporting a relatively small proportion of increasingly wealthy people, rather than focused more on rapidly increasing reliable energy, transport, educational and health infrastructures for the majority of the populations.

In terms of income, sub-Sahara is one of the most unequal regions in the world. Increased national growth and income is not yet having the expected ' trickle down' impact on overall poverty, access to education, resources or formal secure employment. While GDP and 'economic growth in $ terms' have increased faster than much of the rest of the world, Sub-Saharan Africa as a whole still scores very low on the three dimensions of the Human Development Index, with only 3 non African countries also in the lowest 30 globally.

Aside from the traditional geographic matrixes of cultural and linguistic differences, cultural and linguistic differences are now highly stratified between rural and urban populations, inter-generational groups, social and economic status as well as access to resources. 60% of rural Africans do not live within 2kms of an all season road, with over 50% having no access to electricity. 80% or more of rural and in many cases, urban populations cook on wood sourced biomass. As such, in many countries, the number of people in formal taxed, mostly urban employment is low, with 'vulnerable employment' as high as 77.4% in 2013.

Traditionally mostly rural, African culture has been described by Western anthropologists and cultural experts as ' communal', 'communitive' as opposed to 'agentic' (Bakan 1966) and focused around the extended family. This has led some cultural lenses to see 'sub-Saharan Africa' treated, almost as a single unit, embodying a similar set of cultural behaviours (See Lewis R www.crosscultures.com) [2]. In actual fact, the geographical (ethnic), linguistic, urban and economically stratified realities, even within countries, are very much more distinct and highly nuanced. Those participating in workshops that use tools such as Diversity Icebreaker are likely to be some of the relatively few, in urbanised formal organisational settings, with access to full secondary and tertiary education, being fluent in the post colonial languages of government and commerce (English, French and Portuguese) and familiar with how to interact in 'Western' style organisational structures.

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[2] See http://www.crossculture.com/product/cultures-of-the-world-world-europe-map/# Last accessed on June 29th 2015. Except South Africa all of Africa is red and the in country profiles mostly the same.

Sub-Saharan Africa is undergoing rapid change in many different ways and it is worth exploring whether Diversity Icebreaker can take a group through a process that allows them to then find a comfortable way of reflecting on and exploring the implications of all the different changing 'cultural fault-lines' surfacing, evolving and transforming across sub-Saharan Africa.

The cultural heritage of the questionnaire and process and different concepts of self

The Diversity Icebreaker was developed in a Norwegian context, and so it is important to question whether it is bound within its original cultural context, especially, as Scandinavian cultures tend to be very anti-authoritarian, egalitarian, collectivist in work situations (Smith, Andersen, Ekelund, Graversen, and Ropo, 2002). It needs be tested and assessed as to whether the Diversity Icebreaker functions differently in other cultural contexts, and especially in relation to collectivist or individualist societies. Since the questionnaire involves 'self' reflection, it also raises the question 'are concepts of self, the starting points, similar or different across different cultures?

Being able to adapt one's own cognitive and communication style and approach to others and maximise the benefit of interacting, demands some self-awareness of one's own preferences and habits. It also implies some curiosity about the way they are interpreted by others as well as the impact one's own behaviour and preferences have on others. Particularly since the 1990's, academics have been exploring the evidence across many field and disciplines that people from different cultures hold diverse conceptions about self (eg; Allan R.L. 2001).

Most questionnaires and psychometric tools have been developed within an American or European socio-cultural context and are often based on the assumption of a strongly individuated, fairly context free, sense of self... 'where the individual is seen as an independent, self- contained, monadic entity who comprises a unique configuration of internal attributes (e.g. traits, abilities, motives and values and behaves in a certain way as a results of these attributes'. This is different from a more interdependent sense of self that would highlight cooperation, interdependence and collective responsibility and warrants further in depth discussion.

Many surmise that although individuals all tend to have some sense of self, the content, process and structures of that sense are likely to be very different based on different sociocultural contexts and life experiences. When the 'Big Five' personality taxonomy, of openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness and neuroticism was developed in the USA, it was found to be 'robust' across at least 55 nationalities and validated against other Western generated psychometric factors, as was Diversity Icebreaker. At the same time, over the last decade, in China, the sixth factor of interpersonal inter-relatedness, mirroring a more truly interdependent sense of self has emerged that is now being tested in the USA and other cultures and found to be significant.(E.g Fan W, et al. 2011)

African societies and identities can be described as traditionally focused around ' locality' community, age groups, and kinship… all of which contribute to a sense of socially meaningful belonging and obligations based on reciprocity. (Danner H., 2012). Some scholars propose that African cosmologies are more inclined towards a self reflecting principle of 'I am because we are and because we are therefore I am', in other words, a more interdependent sense of self than a strongly more isolated individuated one. Some scholars emphasize that cultures differ to the degree to which they emphasize competition, cooperation or individualism or not or the evaluation of self by a generalised other or by a specific reference group. (Eg: Triandis H.C. 2001). Since Singelis's seminal article (Singelis 1994) scholars have explored the validity of proposing two different self-construals -independent

and interdependent- and the extent to which these are quite basic to the most general schemata of an individuals 'self-system'. In other words, senses of self may differ significantly with regards to the degree of separation, as distinct from the degree of connection, with generalised or significant others. Other researchers have since suggested that only a multidimensional approach with six or seven factors can begin to distinguish culturally different senses of self, grouped into three overarching constructs of self–differentiation, other-focus and self-containment (Eg Owe et al 2012, 2013).

Each of the statements in the Diversity Icebreaker questionnaire start with 'I' and so may be seen to be making a very basic assumption that the participant does have a bounded, contextually independent individuated sense of self. Even statements that support a cognitive preference for focusing on people (red) include self-referent statements such as 'I'm easy to get to know,' 'I'm patient with others', 'I tell my thoughts to others', 'I like to meet lots of people' may not explore the extent of, or kinds of inter-related interaction with other people that influence personal behaviour, decisions and a much broader sense of self. In other words, while some of the content and structure of constructs around individuated 'self and 'personality' can be usefully identified and measured across cultures, they may be missing aspects of a more 'communitive', inter-related sense of self, even when one dimension focuses on interacting with people.

So a question arises; 'If the purpose of the DI 'process' is to create enough in-group/ out-group and self-reflections, sharing and thoughts about adapting to each other, do the possible limitations of the assumptions in the use of 'I' in the Diversity Icebreaker questionnaire invalidate the aim of using it in a very different cultural setting? ' The feedback from the facilitator's who have used it in Africa suggests that it does not. The process of using it does often stimulate generally good-natured self and in-group/ out-group reflection and foster more openness and emotional safety in discussing differences and how to best work and effectively engage together. This was re-emphasized by one of the facilitators being obliged to use Lewis's model of culture active,(Red, Blue and Yellow) yet by using it with the same processes as the DI group processes, it had a very positive similar outcome.

There are different levels of cross-cultural investigation possible. The simplest one is comparing means of Red, Blue and Green in African samples compared with Global norms. A preliminary analysis yields the results below.
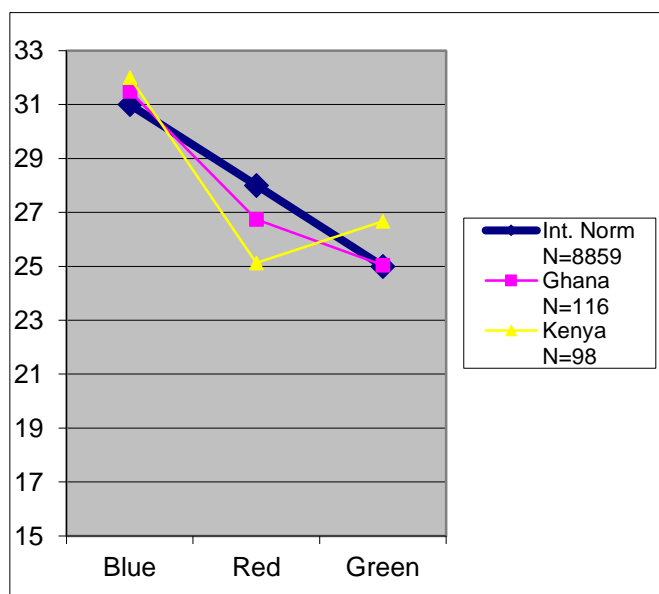
As we can see from the illustration above, there were fewer individuals with red as a dominant colour in the two samples where data could be gathered. This is surprising due to the Western based research documenting correlations between Red and "Collectivism". However, do the results above suggest that a correlation between 'red' and 'collectivism' is perhaps too easily equated with an expectation that participants based in Africa would score higher on red? Do we need to question the applicability of a Western conceptualisation of 'collectivism' which was created by western based scholars as the opposite of the Western 'individualism'? Does the conceptualisation of the term 'collectivism' as 'the practice or principle of giving a group priority over each individual in it' actually correlate to a possibly much more dynamic reality of 'self' in Africa? A polyrhythmic dynamic that creates an integral, yet on-going, sense of self, choices and actions through interpersonal inter-relatedness and a 'communitive' humanness which prioritises maintaining social harmony as well as individual psychological health (Loutzenheiser M 2008) and achievement, that underpins many deep African cosmologies? These are important questions for taking African leadership and self-awareness forward and they stress the need for developing questionnaires and tools that arise from changing African cultural psychological realities.

There may be many actual reasons for the non 'stereotypical' scores above. One is explored above; that the way that 'I' is used in the 'red' dimensional statements in Diversity Icebreaker, may not pick up the essence of a more complex relationally interdependent sense of self that is part of a more traditional African dynamic. Another possible explanation can be that most of the participants have been schooled in English, in Western style individuated competitive educational systems and are working in highly segmented organisations with very specific implementation goals, mostly pre-determined work processes. Organisations in which individuals are measured and rewarded according to personal achievement in delivering timely results and not by collaborative innovation and consensual problem solving. This is a very different environment from the more collective 'talking it through' flexible decision-making and conflict resolution found in many rural African cultures.

The above results, the lower red scores and higher green from Kenyan based workshops, may also hint at the different cultural norms in different countries and regions within Sub-Saharan Africa. Kenya is known for it entrepreneurial and opportunistic business culture. This has not always been admired by those looking for a more 'humane' 'socialist' approach. Kenyan culture was allegedly once described by Joseph Nyerere, former President of Tanzania, as a 'man-eat-man society'. In his view, in the 1970s – 1990's land, national assets and freedoms such as freedom of expression were controlled by too small a cadre of a privileged few.   So even though Kenya scores lower on red and higher on green than a larger international average, the truth is that no national cultural norms can be meaningfully correlated to a very limited number of DI questionnaires. This is especially so, as there appears to be a perhaps even stronger socio-cultural influence on personal scores from organisational culture and chosen professions.

In the published comparisons of data from different countries and discussed from a cross-cultural points of view (Ekelund, Shneor and Gherke, 2008), Italian business students had similar scores as the Norwegian norm. However, when the results of respondents from same professional culture were compared the results were different. Italian business students scored highest on Red and least on Green, compared with business students from USA, France, Mexico, Denmark and Switzerland. The differences between combined group of business students and Italian business students on Red and Green were significant at lower than 1% level. If we combine this data with results on cultural values at the individual level described, it is fair to assume that Italian business students at a group level are more Red, implying more

polychronic 3, more collectivistic and more egalitarian in their cultural values. These results indicate the need to be aware of professional and organizational cultures when we compare data across nations and cultures, even though there may be some generalised overlaps between normative cultural values and preferences in the Red, Blue and Green categories of Diversity Icebreaker. As some facilitators reflected:

" Wrong hypothesis (!) with first group in South Africa. Since we are working with primarily non-profit personnel or those from health sector that are involved in an exchange program to promote peace and knowledge-sharing, we assumed there would be many more "reds". In fact, there was over 50% "blues" in both large groups we have worked with so far."

In other aid and development focused organizations the same comments were reported sometimes with up to 70% of participants dominant in blue. This might be due to the organisational need of structure, and individual commitments to delivering impact within set time frames being uppermost in participants' minds within the overall 'red' primary purpose and context of 'caring for others', 'relieving poverty'- and similar humanitarian values that motivate people to work in these type of organisations.

With regard to cultural differences overall, the process of filling in the questionnaires and using them as the basis for the following group processes has been carried out in many different countries, including Japan, Korea, Italy, Russia and the USA. Anecdotal post-workshop reports collected so far, indicate that the processes are similar in character in most locations.

One facilitator commented that 'some of the participants felt uncertainty around gathering data for research purposes. Maybe this can be done with more confidentiality'. Participants are asked for their scores, age, gender, profession and organisation. While some 'cultural' measures would have been interesting, it is known that passport nationality does not necessary reflect someone's 'culture' and so it is hard to find a universally valid term to ask. It is important to be open about data collection and it has generated interesting broad averages. A conclusion from a presentation at Academy of International Business in 2008 on the international use of the process was "We believe this needs a more thorough analysis, and would like to encourage other researchers to pursue this challenge …..." (Ekelund, Shneor and Gehrken, 2008). It is not possible to make any cultural generalisations based on these few Diversity Icebreaker scores, yet we can focus on the feedback from the workshop processes that follow the filling in of the questionnaire.

Discussions and summary
Relevant for Africa

As described above, almost all the facilitators' reported that the outcome of using the DI processes was positive and led to an appropriate level of self-reflection and light-hearted in-group out-group exploration. Many of the fault-lines in African society, arising from deeply troubled histories with ex-colonial cultures, uncertainty with new partners, such as the Chinese, Brazilians, colonial exacerbation of ethnic divides, as well as legacies of in-balanced minority power and wealth and the increasingly unequal distribution of resources as well as rapid urbanisation, are deeply difficult and embedded issues. One of the students in Ghana commented that the self-reflective humour, combined with the probability of red, blue and green cutting across ethnic background, makes the Diversity Icebreaker process potentially

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3 This refers to a preference for doing multiple things at once in 'polychronic' more circular time patterns than 'monochronic' more linear approaches to time and activities.

relevant to working with the current interactions and prejudices between tribes. The final reflective learning discussions can also bring to the surface memories of when participants themselves experienced crossing ethnic boundaries, such as one Kenyan who reflected how he discovered that the tribal stereotypes he had been raised with did not apply when he went to boarding school in Nairobi. Eliciting and having participants share such stories is a great tool for reinforcing the need to go beyond less relevant stereotypes and prejudices and to explore differences positively.

Again, the extensive use of the process in the context of international aid and development partners working in an African context, DI is relevant in highlighting the function of establishing a positive common ground, a shared language, from which to then explore the trickier fault-lines of history, ownership and power.

Method critique

This paper is based on brief qualitative and some quantitative reports from mostly European and American based consultants working short-term in Africa. Feedback from more African origin and Africa-based consultants would probably lead to other types of reflection and learning points. At the same time, the Western oriented facilitators can be more prone to surprising learning points, due to their different cultural backgrounds.

There is a real need to explore the statements in the questionnaire from an African 'emic' perspective. For instance, focus groups could be used to stimulate to more in-depth understanding of cultural differences. Structured participant evaluations of the seminars could add much more objective feedback of their impact, as is being done with DI in the Middle East (Rubel et al, 2014)

Summary

Despite the limitations of the data, there is a lot of support that the Diversity Icebreaker processes can work as positively in sub-Saharan African organisational settings as in other parts of the world to allow groups to experience working positively across a created fault-line based on individual differences. Groups can then take this process forward to look at some of the more emotionally charged and difficult historical fault-lines, possible speeding up building some of the bridges already being formed by education, modernisation and urbanisation.

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Appendix

Research questions for DI article on African experiences.

1) Describe as much as possible with a few words the setting for the training seminars, eg:
   I. Purpose of the workshop
   II. Which organisation or mix of organisations?
   III. Location where the workshop was held
   IV. Composition of participants in terms of nationality, skills and gender
   V. Where and how did DI fit in the programme?

Going into another country or region is a cross-culturally practise where learning opportunities emerge as surprising moments between un/conscious assumptions and actual experiences.

What kind of learning / or what surprised you

2) Concerning your role as a DI facilitator? Some surprises?

3) About how the participants responded to the seminar process?

4) About the content of Red, Blue or Green on the Flip charts?

5) About how the participants expressed what impact the structure, process or learning had on them individually and as a group/ team.

6) Are there any other type of "learning" that you think is important to bring forward?

7) Do you have an excel overview / or summary of the group results for the Red, Blue and Green scores? Eventually if not, any indiciation of how many participants that took part?