

# The Intercultural Viability Indicator™

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2021

## A CASE STUDY

### Illustrating

...applications of the IVI with both a leadership team and the wider organization

### Analyzing

... the intercultural synergy potential within a sample organization

### Identifying

...targeted interventions to boost the power of diversity and deal with unpredictable change



## What is the Intercultural Viability indicator?

**The IVI is an anonymous web-based questionnaire with a demographic section, an initial single self-assessment section and eight other assessment sections. These sections ask respondents to state the extent to which they notice around them in the organization certain behaviors in typical business contexts, e.g. virtual meetings, social encounters, written communication etc. The different behavioral options offered in each section relate directly to Bennett's highly reliable and validated 6-stage DMIS (Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity).**

The model shows how people's experience of difference develops from ethnocentric to more ethnorelative stages. The more 'advanced' our stage of collective intercultural sensitivity, the more we will increase the odds of being 'Interculturally Viable'; the more interculturally viable we are, the higher the chances to adjust and innovate in constantly changing contexts where collaborative interaction across a multicultural organization is required.



## A tool supporting leaders in navigating in unpredictable futures

This case will illustrate the different ways that the Intercultural Viability Indicator can support organizations in measuring intercultural effectiveness as a key contributor to developing a viable organization in the face of unpredictable and constant change.

It will also show how leaders can use the results to act more intentionally and economically in their coordination of intercultural development and so significantly increase the chances of becoming or remaining interculturally viable compared to other organizations.

The IVI reliable answers two key questions:

“How relatively well are we doing in creating a climate of respect for diversity that will serve us in the future?”

“How can we increase the probability of developing more adaptive and innovative relationships between colleagues?”

## The Organization X Case Study

Because of the confidential nature of the IVI reports, here we present a composite case made up of typical elements that emerge from our findings

**Let’s imagine that Organization X (ORGX) is a successful family-owned company with 1,500 employees, most of whom working in the country of the Head Office. ORGX is in a sector which experienced an increased demand during the first months of the Covid-19 pandemic, leaving a healthy balance sheet and additional funds for a war chest ready for acquisitions.**

There are already a number of affiliates and representative offices around the world, and there are plans to expand by acquiring complementary local brands in other global locations. At present, regular international exposure in head office is today limited to approximately 100 individuals.

The Leadership Team (LT) is made up both of those who historically pioneered international expansion as well as a number of recently onboarded members, head hunted from larger multinationals. The latter group has been hard at work to introducing rigorous standard operating procedures, processes and systems to replace many of the ‘looser’ more informal, implicit and relationship-oriented ways of working in ORGX.

The LT of 12 members completed the IVI with adjusted instructions to limit their perceptions to the experience of collaborating with other members of the LT. Subsequently the IVI was completed by the 100 most internationally exposed members of ORGX outside of the LT, asking them to refer to their experience of everyone they come in contact with in ORGX.

# Overall Intercultural Viability (IV)

Let's go directly to the bottom line (Fig. 1). While the LT shows a significantly above average Intercultural Viability score<sup>1</sup>, ORGX as a whole is significantly below the baseline of other organizations. What do these data indicate?

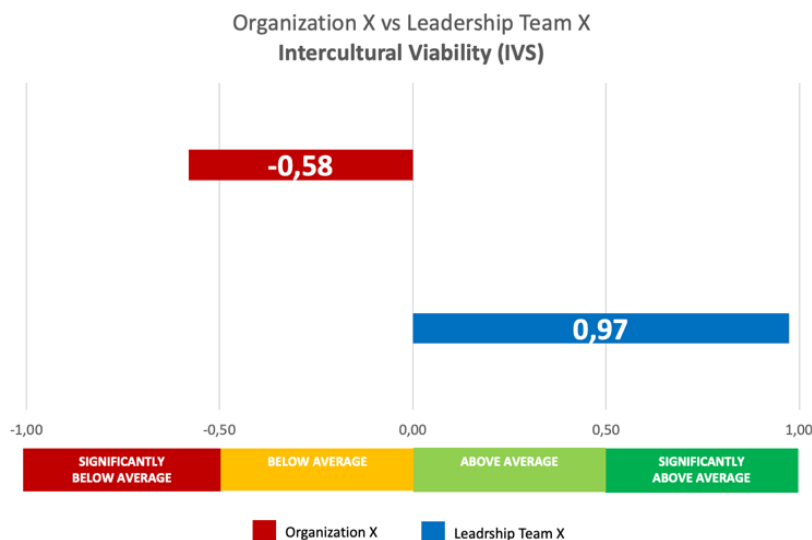


Fig. 1: Intercultural Viability (IV)

- Within the confines of the relationships in the LT there is a high level of potential 'fitness' to adapt to changing multicultural conditions. They have a high likelihood of capitalizing on the synergetic effect of both individual and group behavior, certainly more than the average in other organizations.
- This may in part be supported by the IVI's demographic data from the LT showing that 75% have lived abroad for at least 12 months and that 58% have received intercultural training. All ORGX LT members are over 40 years of age. Bennett (2020) explores our findings from the IVI on these variables which show living abroad, intercultural training and increased age as correlating with higher IV scores. This is the good news.
- The conversation to be had with the LT is around the mismatch between the high probability of coordinating interculturably viable behavior within the team and their need to realize that this probability is not mirrored in the rest of the organization outside the LT. ORGX leadership members use a widely inclusive 'we' when referring to how ORGX deals with cultural diversity. They may be over-estimating the wider organization's capacity for intercultural competence.
- This disconnect between a synergetic LT and a more insular behavior in the organization could negatively impact on international expansion plans where a wider community in ORGX will become increasingly involved in collaborating across cultures.
- It may also reduce the probability of successfully implementing leadership's initiative to introduce short-term assignments within Head Office by talent in the affiliates. More on this later.

<sup>1</sup> For a detailed explanation of the instrument and its development, components and its underlying methodology read: Bennett, M (2021) – The Intercultural Viability Indicator: Assessing the Intercultural Competence of Organizations: *Journal of Intercultural Communication & Interaction Research*

# Contextual Viability (CV)

The IVI report provides scores for Context Viability (CV) across 8 business contexts compared to a stable baseline of all other organizations. This represents: 'the interaction between the individual self-perception of the respondent [across the DMIS] and the respondent's perception of the contexted group behavior' (Bennett, 2021). How probable is it that the group in question will take advantage in specific contexts of cultural diversity to adapt to the surrounding changes in social conditions? What does the CV scoring (Fig 2.) from ORGX suggest?

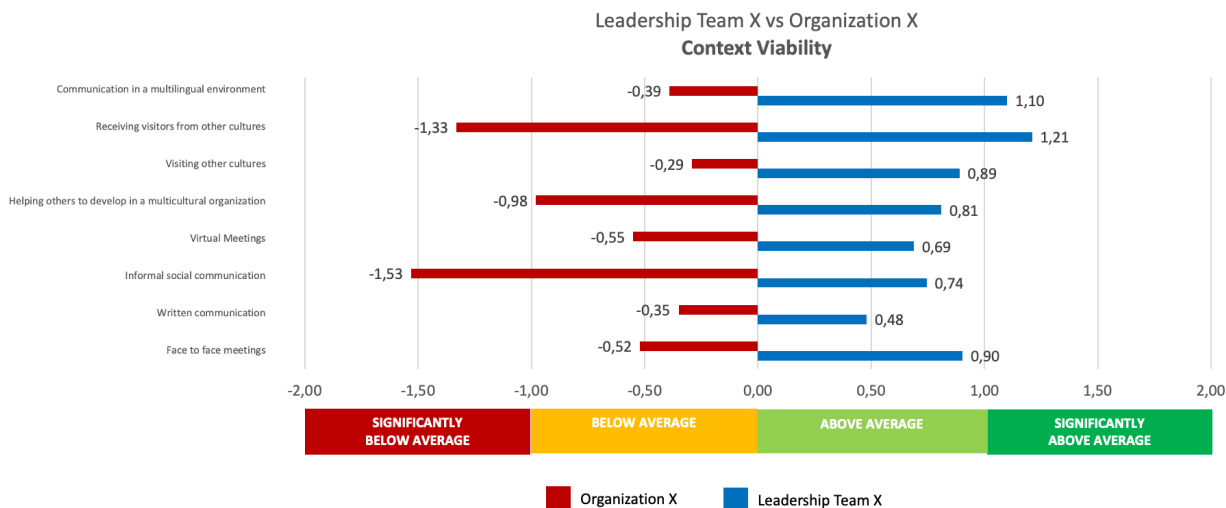


Fig. 2: Context Viability Score (CV)

- Once again there is a clear mismatch between the LT and the overall organization. With this data the LT can see which situations within the wider organization would benefit most from targeted initiatives.
- The two biggest Intercultural Viability gaps between the two groups are in Receiving Visitors from other Cultures and in Informal Social Communication. If we think about the LT's plans to introduce an exchange program for affiliate talents within Head Office, there is likely to be a mismatch between the LT's expectation that because we perceive ourselves to show sensitivity through cultural adaptation in these situations, so will everyone else in the organization.
- These results give leadership the chance to focus intercultural sensitivity development on a very practical, specific context and challenge: how will we create the conditions for visiting colleagues to feel welcome and integrated across the organization through mutual adaptation?
- The results may also suggest that even within the LT, the contexts in which they score lowest (Written Communication and Virtual Meetings) have become much more important as the organization adopts remote working arrangements with office staff in response to the post-Covid-19 situation, rather than face-to-face exchanges. The developmental focus here could be on how to more consciously show intercultural sensitivity in a virtual working context.

# Group Development Scores (GDS)

This score (Fig. 3) shows how respondents perceive the behavior of others across the 8 business contexts. With these data, we can see how the LT is rating itself compared to how the organization is rating itself in general<sup>2</sup>. These comparisons give additional guidance on how to fine tune interventions that will increase overall Intercultural Viability.

For instance, in addition to the two areas of Receiving Visitors and Informal Social Communication that were already mentioned, the organization in general rates itself below average in Communicating in a Multilingual Environment, which the LT rates itself above average. This could indicate another blind spot in intercultural development, where the LT may fail to see the need for more work in the organization on dealing with multilingual environments, since the LT itself probably doesn't experience any problems in that area. Leadership's lack of awareness of this gap may be due to a limited line of sight into collective organizational behavior or because they have been unable to transfer expectations of positive intercultural behavior to the rest of the organization.

With below average scores the wider organization, as reported by the 100 international players, ORGX is likely to underperform in instances where intercultural collaboration is key to success. Since Leadership is increasing the potential for intercultural exposure through imminent acquisitions, there is the danger that the wider organization will not be supportive of this process through its day-to-day behavior. The GDS score help us to see which situations are likely to be more problematic.

In general, the findings of the GDS indicate that ORGX should be focusing primarily on improving performance in those areas in which it is most below average - Receiving Visitors and Informal Social Communication - and secondarily in Communicating in a Multilingual Environment.

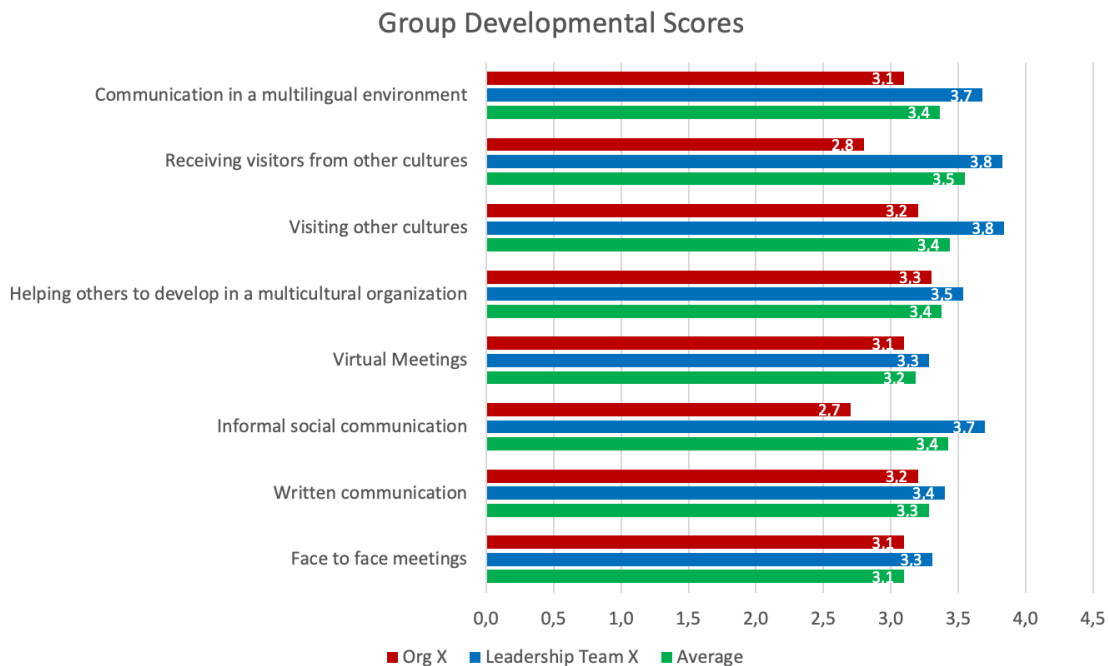


Fig. 3: Group Developmental Scores (GDS), comparing ORGX, the leadership team and the IVI database average.

<sup>2</sup> We should note that individuals both in the LT and within the 100 international players group see themselves as generally more intercultural developed than those they observe around them.

# Individual Development Scores (IDS)

Fig. 4 shows the score for the Leadership Team, as well as the 100 most internationally exposed respondents (Organization X) and the database average. With the IDS score, leadership in organizations can see the average perception of how interculturally developed individuals see themselves to be in terms of intercultural sensitivity. They can compare their own average self-perceptions of intercultural development within the LT with how the 100 international players who responded to the IVI see themselves.

Both the Leadership Team and 100 international players see themselves as more interculturally developed than the database average, with the leadership team scoring the higher of the two ORGX groups.

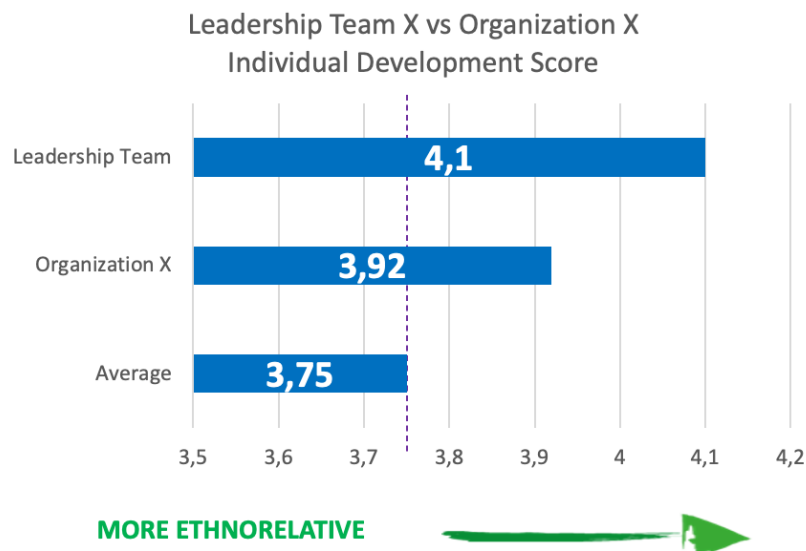
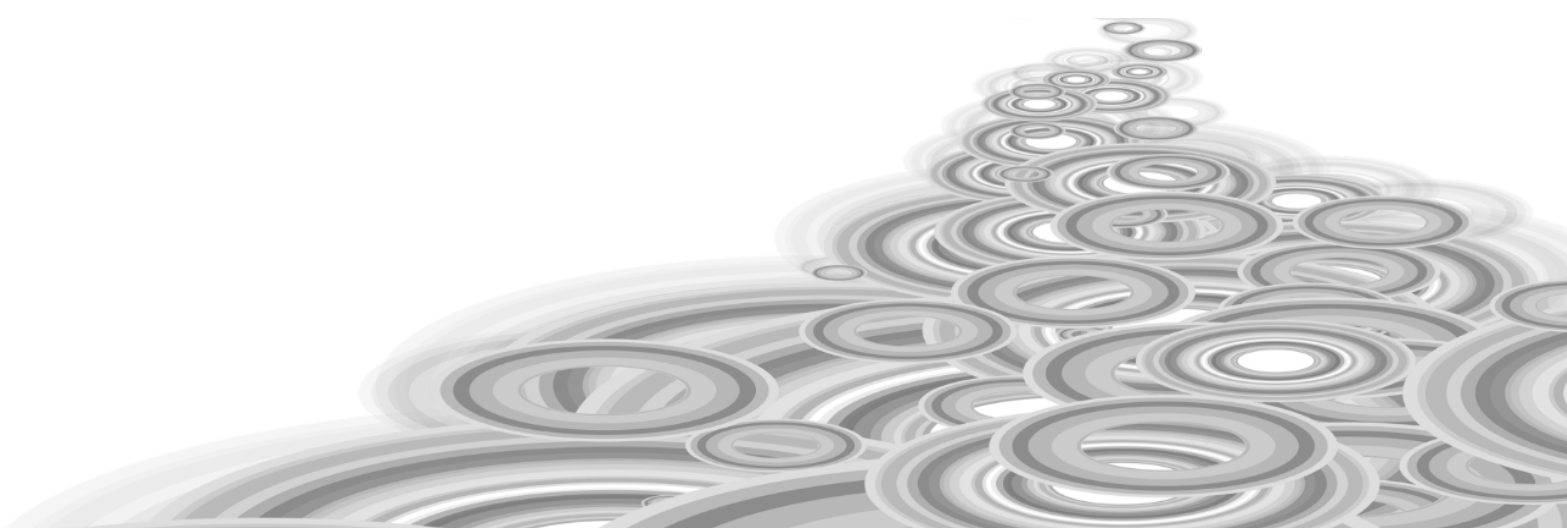


Fig. 4: Individual Development Scores (IDS)





# Possible recommendations for Organization X (1)

## 1. **AVOID A THINLY SPREAD ROLL OUT OF INTERCULTURAL DEVELOPMENT**

Firstly, it is unproductive to 'roll out' intercultural development initiatives widely or randomly across the organization. Nor is it always helpful to start the developmental focus with groups showing lower Individual Development scores (IDS). OK, but who do we focus on? We would suggest targeting teams, functional groups or segments of the organization who scored highly in IDS. Do this especially if those members have high informal influence across the organization.

## 2. **INVEST HEAVILY IN INTERCULTURALLY 'ADVANCED' INFLUENCERS**

ORGX should focus most of its L&D budget on the 100 international players included in the IVI survey who are scoring highly in the IDS compared to the rest of the organization. It may seem contradictory - after all, the rest of the organization needs intercultural development more than this group. Indeed, in my own experience, more advanced intercultural communicators rarely receive advanced intercultural training as they have been identified as already 'successful'. The box has been ticked.

However, their success is usually the result of years of trial and error leading to tacit intercultural sensitivity. Training based on the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) would give them a shared theoretical understanding of their own intercultural development process and enable them to intentionally recognize, encourage and spread interculturally effective behaviors in others within their immediate network who are at more ethnocentric stages of development.

After all people do things for three main reasons: because they want to, because they are told to do it or because people in their trusted social network are doing so. The last of these, focusing on horizontal influence, is rarely consciously employed by organizations in the pursuit of behavioral change. Imagine the impact of 100 articulate and interculturally developed individuals who understand the strategic importance Intercultural Viability and their collective role in spreading it through daily example, encouragement and engagement with peers. Then contrast this with facing 100 individuals in the early ethnocentric stages of intercultural development who have just been told to attend a virtual class on cultural diversity.



# Possible recommendations for Organization X (2)

### 3. RAISE CONSCIOUS INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE WITHIN THE LT

The same principle applies to Leadership Teams with high Intercultural Viability. Leadership teams tend to show higher Intercultural Viability within their team context than the general population has towards those around them. This is unsurprising since LT members frequently have a higher-than-average age (life experience), experience abroad and exposure to intercultural training. The ORGX LT should receive master classes or intercultural coaching to act more consciously as interculturally effective role models for the organization – knowing what behaviors to model and recognize. They could also be made more aware of how they could leverage the higher-than-average intercultural competence of the 100 international players across the ORGX.

### 4. DEVELOP INTERCULTURAL SENSITIVITY THROUGH VIRTUAL CHANNELS

With the shift to remote working and the lower CV scores on Written Communication and Virtual Meetings within the LT, it would be beneficial for the LT to learn how to more intentionally apply its intercultural sensitivity to distributed collaboration in a multicultural context.

### 5. AUDIT THE INTERCULTURAL SENSITIVITY OF THE NEW STANDARD PROCESSES

ORGX should review its newly implemented standard processes and procedures for the flexibility they allow in dealing with cultural differences in unique ways. To what extent are company-wide protocols putting some cultural groups at a disadvantage? Has ORGX constructed processes that both coordinate AND allow flexible action with a culturally diverse organization?

### 6. INTERCULTURAL FOCUS ON STRATEGIC INITIATIVES

To improve the social conditions for the successful implementation of plans to bring over talents from the affiliates to the Head Office, initiate a short but targeted program aimed at hosting and informal socializing with long-term visitors from other cultural backgrounds.





# Conclusions

The *Intercultural Viability Indicator* supports leaders in increasing the probability that their organization can survive and thrive in the face of unpredictable change: by measuring intercultural competence at an organizational level and by identifying targeted interventions across a culturally diverse workforce.

Intercultural Viability at an organizational level can be compared to making choices about your own personal health. There is no guarantee that by eating healthily or taking regular exercise you will live a longer, healthier life – but you will increase the percentage odds of this happening. With the IVI, leadership can swing the odds in their favor, knowing how they compare to other organizations. At a time when many organizations are thinking beyond ‘emergency mode’ and looking for strategic direction while aiming to get agility and change-ability into the water supply, perhaps the best place to start is by shoring up the Intercultural Viability of the organization. Your organization may be culturally diverse but there is no measurable probability that this diversity is being turned into a real asset by coordinating the probability of effective intercultural behavior.

To take care of the ‘underlying health conditions’ within your organization you need to become aware of its relative readiness to tap into its cultural diversity potential.

There has never been more urgency in organizations to deal with an unknown future. Now is the time for leaders to substantiate and influence the Intercultural Viability of their organization.

For more information and details of how to use the Intercultural Viability Indicator within your own organization, go to: [www.interculturalviability.com](http://www.interculturalviability.com)



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