



CASE STUDY

USING EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING ACTIVITIES IN JAPAN

Axel and Karin Wellbrock lead Kay Group, a talent and leadership development company, based in Tokyo, leveraging their global life sciences leadership and management consulting experience.

A leading US medical device company with a presence in Tokyo asked Kay Group to conduct an off-site meeting for their newly established commercial operations teams with the aim to support their culture change to develop a more “winning” attitude.

After consultation with Ann Alder, training director at RSVP Design, the day was designed to use three RSVP Design tools:

Images of Organisations
Challenging Assumptions
Mystery Object.

The 16 team members started the day with using the Images of Organisations, a diverse set of pictures in a cartoon style. The purpose was to warm-up the members and to gain insights into how they currently see their function. Karin and Axel have been using Images of Organisations extensively in other client events, however, this time the uncovering process was even more profound. Karin said:

“Even the head of the function expressed his surprise when he heard his members explain what the pictures meant to them. This generated a lot of new insights and deeper understanding about the present situation and desires of the members.”

Next, they used Challenging Assumptions, where Axel and Karin deliberately let the team fail to help them to understand their ingrained thinking and learn new ways of working. Again the exercise provided deep insight into how the team members interacted and addressed a given problem.

Finally, they used the Mystery Object to spark creativity, innovation and develop pitching skills. The workshop members were grouped in pairs with two roles: designers and coaches. While developing the pitch, excitement in the room was going up and a friendly and fun competition started between the pairs. Some of the pitches were presented in a tv-shopping-channel which showed the creative and funny side of the participants.

In the debrief after the workshop, it was clear that whilst some members found the exercises challenging, they all agreed that they had learned new skills and got to know each other much better. They felt more energized and better prepared for the new challenges in 2020.

While reflecting on the workshop, Axel and Karin said:

“One of the key lessons learned is to allocate a lot more time to experiential exercises in Japan. For one, the explanation of the exercises need to be very detailed and with check back before starting; second, the time for doing the exercise need to be longer than in other geographies due to the longer time required for Japanese to get started; finally, the debriefs which are crucial for the learning need to be managed very carefully. For one to tease out opinions, thoughts and ideas from the participants and second, to help with the learning transfer to their workplace.”

Overall, Axel and Karin felt that the RSVP Design tools were “tremendously powerful” in all stages of team development as well as for enhancing particular skills, e.g. thinking. Karin mentioned:

“I have been a management consultant for almost 20 years and used to spend a good part of any project collecting information and doing problem diagnosis. With the help of RSVP Design tools, though, the diagnosis of teams is almost immediate thanks to observing teams in action or by using images which say more than a thousand words.”

Additionally, Karin was complimentary about other RSVP Design products. She had recently used a business planning tool known as “Voyage Mapping” with a rising star to prepare himself for the upcoming promotion into a leadership role and on another occasion for 2020 planning for a finance department of a leading pharmaceutical company. Karin noted:

“The notion of the destination island and the stickers used for the Voyage Mapping exercise really unleash lots of creativity and create new dynamics while planning. Using RSVP Design tools allows people to get “off the beaten path” of thinking and doing in organizations and to start and act differently.”