

The Third Culture

The Kebab effect - and the building of the so-called third culture

Döner Kebab is a bright example of a merger of two cultures while creating a third, extremely successful one.

Originally, Döner Kebab (Turkish: *döner kebabi*, lit. *rotating roast*) was traditional Turkish grilled lamb meat. It probably came from nomads who used to roast meat on a sword over a fire. In Turkey, it is typically served on a plate, garnished with tomatoes or peppers.

Its current form is attributed to Mahmut Aygün, a Turkish immigrant to Germany. In the 1970's, he wrapped the traditional kebab into a sandwich and began to garnish it with pickles or red cabbage and the garlic, herb or chilli sauces which were available. Today, the Germans spend some 20 billion a year for their 'kebab sandwich'. Moreover, it spread from Germany to the whole world.

Such a merger of two cultures, the so-called third culture, has proven very successful. It shows that Mahmut discovered how to translate something which had a meaning for himself into something which has an added value for people at the other end of the world. He discovered a product - neither quite Turkish, nor quite German - which people enjoy around the world.

Is this kebab-effect possible in organizations? What is required for such a synergy to occur?

One of the main factors influencing the rise or fall of an organization is its organizational culture. The so-called third culture also relates to cultures which already exist in an organization - no matter whether they arrived with individual employees, or with a merger. They both have their place there - just like the garlic sauce on the slices of lamb in the kebab. If they merge into one, they will become even better. There will be no Red culture or a Blue culture, but a Violet culture.

How to get there?

1. **Be patient** - change in the culture develops through evolution, not by revolution.
2. **Get to know each other.** First understand how culture influences your behaviour and be aware of both sides' reactions to 'the other'. It's not about suppressing cultural differences. It's all about managing the resulting uncertainty and turning negative feelings into curiosity. The trick is to put away one's initial assessment - only then we can see what otherwise our autopilot has hidden in our minds. Then, through mutual interaction, pick the cultural differences which play a role in the most frequent situations (e.g. the way decisions are made in the organization, the cognitive styles, communication, leadership, dealing with information, conflict resolution, etc.).
3. **Lead a cultural dialogue.** After the differences have been mapped, a dialogue emerges - bringing insight into the specific perspectives and their inner logic. The aim is not to decide which of them is the better one, but rather to understand what is behind the individual expectations, attitudes and requirements. It enables you identify the key relevant differences and the common traits, needs, expectations and goals.
4. **Integrate.** The purpose of this step is to find a new way, the so-called third culture, i.e. to translate the intents and ideas into specific steps, processes and procedures. It's not the 'either - or' job - the kebab would never exist if Mahmut asked a question whether he will sell lamb or garlic sauce. We must rather focus on finding such a way which will allow each party keep its identity.
5. **Tell stories.** It is believed that nothing motivates people more than emotionally coloured stories. Therefore narrate the stories of successful cultures which met at one - third - table, together with the way which led them to the table.