

### Starting up

- Do you think culturally diverse teams perform better or worse than teams that are culturally similar?
- What are the potential benefits of culturally diverse teams?

### Reading

It takes hard work to help a culturally diverse team succeed. To find out more, read the article and then answer the questions below.

### Reading comprehension

Read the article again and find answers to the following questions.

- 1 What kind of company culture did the founders of Nordigen want to have when they set up the company?
- 2 What good example is given of a company that is open and inclusive?
- 3 Why did things not work out as the founders expected at the beginning?
- 4 How did the founders respond to try to overcome this problem?
- 5 What are some of the things that make a team diverse?
- 6 What enables ethnically diverse groups to price assets more accurately?
- 7 Why do diverse teams often outperform teams which are culturally similar and cognitively alike?
- 8 What are some disadvantages or challenges of diversity in teams?
- 9 What do team members need to do to be able to profit from diversity?
- 10 What rule have the founders of Nordigen introduced to encourage employees to work effectively with colleagues who have different cultural styles?

## It takes hard work to help a diverse team succeed

<sup>1</sup>When Rolands Mesters and Roberts Bernans co-founded Nordigen, a fintech business based in Riga, the Latvian capital, in 2016, they made each other a promise: the company would be open and inclusive, a place where anyone could pitch in with an idea and know that their teammates would listen respectfully.

<sup>2</sup>Then they began hiring salespeople from large corporations and the culture changed. The new hires cared only about making sales, made no effort to get to know the company's engineers and rebuffed their suggestions on how to market its technology.

<sup>3</sup>Though they were good salespeople, they made bad colleagues – and their manner drove others to keep their heads down and their ideas to themselves. So the co-founders did something that might seem to sit oddly with their commitment to inclusivity – they introduced a cultural fit test. “After the first round of interviews we invite team members, at random, to meet the candidate,” says Mr Mesters. The conversations range widely – the point being to find people who can work towards a common goal while remaining unafraid to challenge conventional wisdom. “If we feel the person is ‘one of us’, we hire them.”

<sup>4</sup>Diversity is often seen as an all-round good thing, an idea that research broadly supports. Teams that take in different life experiences, identities and styles of thinking beat monocultures at problem-solving and prediction. Market simulations have also found that ethnically diverse groups price assets more accurately because people are less susceptible to herd behaviour and copying each other's mistakes.

<sup>5</sup>Other studies show that teams in which people approach problems from different angles – some prioritising discovering new things and others preferring to draw on what they already know – outperform teams in which people are cognitively alike.

<sup>6</sup>However, diversity has some downsides. As Nordigen found, simply trusting people with opposing priorities to combine creatively is more likely to expose divisions than produce gains. Differing cultural assumptions can make it harder for teams to bond, and can lead to friction and misunderstandings, hampering the achievement of goals. A recent study, for example, found that people share information more readily with compatriots and colleagues from culturally similar nations.

<sup>7</sup>To profit from diversity, workplaces need to support people to see beyond stereotyping and recognise the value in difference.

<sup>8</sup>Mr Mesters at Nordigen has introduced a rule that teammates should “disagree respectfully” – and where possible put ideas to the test. Recently, an engineer suggested adding live chat to the company's website, which targets banks and alternative lenders. The idea flouted accepted wisdom, and the salespeople were sceptical. But they agreed to a pilot – and the results were so good that it completely upended managers' assumptions.



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## Vocabulary 1

Match the words or phrases in *italics* (1-11) with the best definition or explanation (a-k).

- |   |          |
|---|----------|
| 1 open and <i>inclusive</i>                                 | (para 1) |
| 2 to <i>pitch in</i> with an idea                           | (para 1) |
| 3 the company's engineers <i>rebuffed</i> their suggestions | (para 2) |
| 4 their manner <i>drove</i> others to ...                   | (para 3) |
| 5 unafraid to challenge <i>conventional wisdom</i>          | (para 3) |
| 6 research <i>broadly</i> supports ...                      | (para 4) |
| 7 people are less <i>susceptible to</i> ...                 | (para 4) |
| 8 preferring to <i>draw on</i> what they already know       | (para 5) |
| 9 diversity has some <i>downsides</i>                       | (para 6) |
| 10 <i>hampering</i> the achievement of goals                | (para 6) |
| 11 the idea <i>flouted</i> accepted wisdom                  | (para 8) |

- a rejected
- b preventing something from happening normally
- c in general, in most cases
- d to use
- e to put forward (a suggestion)
- f deliberately went completely against
- g a culture in which everyone can feel part of the organisation
- h disadvantages
- i forced
- j likely to be influenced by something
- k standard and generally accepted ideas about something

## Vocabulary 2

Below are a number of idiomatic expressions from the article. Choose the correct meaning of each one.

- 1 to keep their heads down (para 3)
  - a) to ignore what other people say
  - b) to try not to be noticed by others, especially if there is trouble around you
- 2 to sit oddly with (para 3)
  - a) to be in contradiction to something
  - b) to be strange and unusual
- 3 to put ideas to the test (para 8)
  - a) to try an idea out to see if it works
  - b) to take a vote on new ideas
- 4 completely upended managers' assumptions (para 8)
  - a) totally contradicted them
  - b) totally changed them

## Grammar 1 – linking words and concessive clauses

We use a range of linking words to introduce contrast or concessive clauses. The most common are: *though, although, even though, however, nevertheless, despite* and *in spite of*.

Which two of these words are used in the article to introduce a concessive clause?

## Grammar 2 – linking words and concessive clauses

Complete these sentences using linking words from the list above. Sometimes there is more than one option.

- 1 \_\_\_\_\_ the co-founders of Nordigen wanted their company to have an open and inclusive culture, at the beginning this did not happen.
- 2 \_\_\_\_\_ their best intentions, the salespeople they hired from big companies were too competitive for the open and inclusive culture the co-founders wanted to develop for Nordigen.
- 3 \_\_\_\_\_, the co-founders did not give up on their idea. They decided to change their recruitment and selection process, introducing a cultural fit test.
- 4 \_\_\_\_\_ diversity in teams is often seen as a good thing to have, it can have its downsides.
- 5 Having a live chat facility on a financial services website goes against conventional wisdom. \_\_\_\_\_, in the case of Nordigen, it has proved very successful.

## Discussion

- 1 Having read the article, discuss again and list what you think are the potential benefits of culturally diverse teams.
- 2 What are the potential downsides of culturally diverse teams and how can they be avoided or minimised?
- 3 Have you worked or do you currently work in a culturally diverse team or group? If so, what has your experience been?
- 4 What do you think of the idea of a 'cultural fit test' as part of the selection process when hiring new employees?

## ANSWER KEY

### Reading comprehension

- 1 One that would be open and inclusive.
- 2 A place where anyone could pitch in with an idea and know that their teammates would listen respectfully.
- 3 When they began hiring salespeople from large corporations, the culture changed. The new hires cared only about making sales, made no effort to get to know the company's engineers and rejected their suggestions on how to market its technology. Though they were good salespeople, they made bad colleagues.
- 4 They introduced a cultural fit test. "After the first round of interviews we invite team members, at random, to meet the candidate," says Mr Mesters. The conversations range widely – the point being to find people who can work towards a common goal while remaining unafraid to challenge conventional wisdom. "If we feel the person is 'one of us', we hire them."
- 5 Different life experiences, identities and styles of thinking.
- 6 Because people are less susceptible to group behaviour and copying each other's mistakes.
- 7 Teams in which people approach problems from different angles – some prioritising discovering new things and others preferring to draw on what they already know – outperform teams in which people are cognitively alike.
- 8 Simply trusting people with opposing priorities to combine creatively is more likely to expose divisions than produce gains. Differing cultural assumptions can make it harder for teams to bond, and can lead to friction and misunderstandings, affecting the achievement of goals. A recent study found that people share information more freely with compatriots and colleagues from culturally similar nations.
- 9 To profit from diversity, workplaces need to support people to see beyond stereotyping and recognise the value in difference.
- 10 They have introduced a rule that teammates should "disagree respectfully" – and where possible put ideas to the test.

### Vocabulary 1

- |     |     |      |
|-----|-----|------|
| 1 g | 5 k | 9 h  |
| 2 e | 6 c | 10 b |
| 3 a | 7 j | 11 f |
| 4 i | 8 d |      |

### Vocabulary 2

- |     |     |
|-----|-----|
| 1 b | 3 a |
| 2 a | 4 b |

### Grammar 1

though (para 3)  
however ((para 6)

### Grammar 2

- 1 Although, Though
- 2 Despite, In spite of
- 3 However, Nevertheless
- 4 Although, Though, Even though
- 5 However, Nevertheless

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