

## a case for global leadership: the Kai Bendix story



# Workbook



# A Case for Global Leadership – the Kai Bendix Story

## Introduction

Setting the right direction as a leader and then motivating and aligning people along the way is a tough challenge for any leader. Achieving this in unfamiliar cultural contexts within a global operating environment creates an extra layer of complexity. Yet the ability to integrate global strategy with local perspectives is increasingly the responsibility of individual leaders undergoing international careers on behalf of their organisations.

The 6-part video case looks at how to address leadership challenges that arise when expatriated in an unfamiliar cultural context, and leading a project team consisting of local nationals. What makes this case different is that it is driven by a documentary drama that tells a real story through the mouths of real people. It is the story of Kai Bendix, General Manager of Nivea Beiersdorf in India, who faces three challenges to his leadership, six months after the set-up of the company in Mumbai. He needs to reflect back on his previous leadership experience in Bulgaria, and compare the present realities of India, before deciding how to respond. Local perspectives, impacting on his response, are directly expressed by key members of his management team in each location.

In this half-day session the case will support you in:

- 1) recognizing the challenge of leading people in an unfamiliar cultural context, and the qualities required to be successful
- 2) reflecting on the degree to which you can transfer leadership experience from one environment to another
- 3) responding to three specific leadership challenges faced by a German leader working in India
- 4) understanding how this leader actually responded, and the links to influencing and authenticity

The film itself is shot both in India and Bulgaria, and is divided into scenes that enable the learner to first understand the complexity of the leadership choices Kai faces, before learning what actions he takes and the consequences of those actions. The scenes are as follows:

1. Introduction
2. Drawing on the past
3. The World As You Find It
4. The World As it Finds You
5. Taking Action
6. Results

Each scene will set up of a platform for debate, role-play and discussion in the style of the classic business case. But there is the additional satisfaction of learning what really happened!

## Scene 1: Introduction

In the first scene we get some context as to what Kai Bendix is doing in India, and the leadership challenge he faces six months into his stay.

### Preview: task I

What kind of leadership skills and international competencies do you require to build up a business from zero in an unfamiliar environment (like India)?

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Now view the film and reflect on what this specific leader requires six months into his time in India?

### Postview: task II

You have seen that Kai faces three challenges:

- Challenge 1: At the individual level: a case of bribery by one of his high potential people who he himself had recruited - the dilemma facing him in deciding whether to fire a star employee
- Challenge 2: At the level of partners: how to manage a powerful distributor and regain more control of the business - 'your people are not telling you the whole truth' an accusation by the distribution partner - the dilemma of how to react to the distributor's voice mail
- Challenge 3: At the level of organization: how to embed head office values at a local level and be present in head office while being absent - the climate survey results reveal a low performing organizational culture - how to build a high performing culture in India

Now reflect what he requires in meeting this challenge:

B i) **LEADERSHIP SKILLS** Review the personal qualities you identified before seeing the first scene. Which are manifested in the film? What qualities would you now add based on the specific challenges that Kai faces?

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B ii) **SENSITIVITY TO OTHER FACTORS** What may be the cultural and situational factors which impact on the way he needs to handle his three challenges?

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## Scene2: Drawing on the past

Searching for an anchor to support him in meeting the leadership challenge he now faces in India, Kai looks back at his previous international assignment in Bulgaria.

### Preview: task III

To what degree can you transfer 'past' international experience from one international location to 'present' challenges in another?

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Now view scene 2 and see what you feel is transferable from his past experience

### Postview: task IV

Having viewed the second scene, and looked at the cultural data in the Argonaut Information File included (see **Handout 1**), reflect on:

- i) The cultural tensions which Kai may have been facing when he moved from his home country, Germany, to turn around an under-performing team in Bulgaria

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If we now look at Kai's response to this challenge:

- ii) What additional international leadership competencies can we see in Kai which emerge from this portrait of his activity in Bulgaria?

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- iii) To what extent should he consider transferring 'what worked' from Bulgaria to India? How was the situational challenge different in Bulgaria?

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## Scene 3: The world as you find it

While drawing learning from the past, Kai needs to avoid 'copy-paste' by understanding the specific context he faces in India, and the local perspectives that inform it.

### Preview: questions

- 1) what are the choices Kai faces in making his decisions?
- 2) What local perspectives does he need to understand in making the right choice, and implementing it in the right way? What possible actions can he take?

### Postview: task V

What extra information have you learnt about the challenge Kai faces for each issue, the different cultural perspectives involved and the possible actions he could take?

#### The Individual

the challenge	
cultural perspectives	
possible actions	

#### The Distributor

the challenge	
cultural perspectives	
possible actions	

#### The Organization

the challenge	
cultural perspectives	
possible actions	

## Role-play activity: task VI

You will each be in a group that will prepare a solution to ONE of the three challenges. One member of each group will then be chosen in the plenary to role-play Kai Bendix presenting his decision and approach to one of the interested parties :

**Group A: The Roshan Bribery Case: Pam**

**Group B: The Distributor Case: Thomas Papenfuss, Regional Marketing VP**

**Group C: Organisation issue: Jason Chen, Board Member**

For more information about the specific context of each of these role-plays see **handout 2**. To further support those in group C, see **handout 3**. You have 20 minutes to prepare but only 5 minutes for the role-play. You will then discuss in the plenary each of the solutions delivered in the role-play.

## Alternative role-play activity: task VI

In the plenary you will all be offered the opportunity to deliver your solutions around each of the three issues to someone playing Kai. Wait for your turn to come and offer one piece of advice at a time. When you run out of ideas you can say "Pass".

Having listened to others solution, you will divide up into groups of four where each group will deliver role-play solutions to ALL of the three challenges. One of you will be chosen to role-play Kai Bendix presenting his decision on each challenge to one interested party:

**Group A: The Roshan Bribery Case: Pam**

**Group B: The Distributor Case: Thomas Papenfuss, Regional Marketing VP**

**Group C: Organisation issue: Jason Chen, Board Member**

The other three group members will play Pam, Thomas Papenfuss and Jason Chen. See handout 2. The role-player who is Kai has 15 min (five min for each of the other stakeholders) to influence them to accept his solution to the issue they are connected to. You will then discuss and share back in the plenary the solutions that were delivered in the role-play.

## Scene 4: The World As It Finds You.

We have learnt what you would do acting as Kai, but of course Kai is a real leader with his own style and approach. Leadership is not just about whether you make the 'right' decision but also whether that decision is a 'real' expression of who you are, and what you believe. That's why this scene is called 'The World As it Finds You'.

### Preview discussion: task VII

How would you describe authenticity, and why is it important for leadership? How useful is authenticity when working in a global environment where values and behaviours are so wide-ranging?

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Now view scene 4, and see what it has to say about the personal side of leadership, and how it impacts on Kai

### Postview discussion: task VIII

- a) What do we learn about Kai as an individual that strikes you as authentic, and may guide him in making his decisions?

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- b) One of the consultants mentions the very different focus on 'push' and 'pull' qualities that individual leaders bring to working across cultures. Look at **Handout 4** where Kai reflects on the energy he brings to such qualities (reflected in the results of a psychometric instrument 'The International Profiler') and how this has changed during his time as an international leader. What could have caused this? What is the link to authenticity?

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## Scene 5: Taking Action

Having learnt more about what marks Kai out as an individual, we now learn what he decided to do and how his actions influenced others. His own decisions and actions do not invalidate other possible directions, but need to be congruent with his own values, and the culture of the organisation he wants to build.

### Preview input

One of the consultants talks about an 'Influential moment' as *'a moment when you perceive that your decision is going to be perceived in a certain way by the people around you. You are aware of that and you use it as an opportunity to build an organisational culture'*. In the context of mobility into new cultural context, leadership actions, often in moments of crisis, are an opportunity to build motivation, alignment and the potential for a new organisational culture. An extra layer of complexity is created in unfamiliar cultural environments by invisible differences in values, and lower levels of trust, that can lead to a gap between leadership intentions and leadership impact. This demands heightened cultural sensitivity, accompanied by deeper reflection, about *what* action to take (understanding the complexity of local & global perspectives, and the dilemma of conflicting values). It also demands reflection on *how* the action is taken (sensitive to how others may see the world, and attribute meaning, differently). This includes a focus on 'who' - *who* takes the action and *who* observes the action being taken

Now view scene 5 and not only note 'what' Kai does, but also 'how' he does it and involving 'who'.

### Postview task IX

Note down below what interested you about 'how' Kai implemented his solution to each of the critical incidents?

#### The Individual

#### The Distributor

#### The Organization

How are Kai's actions in line with what we know about him from the previous section and from the insight we have into him from the values questionnaire he completed (Handout 5)?

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## Scene 6: Results

Having seen what Kai actually did to solve his challenges, we find out the results of his actions and a summary of some learnings about leadership. We find out that Kai, despite his qualities as a leader, has some development areas and ongoing challenges to face in the future.

### Preview question

Now view what extra the final scene has to say about Kai, and the challenge of leadership.

### Postview: task X

Note your extra learnings about leadership in the box below

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### Personal reflection: task XI

Take a look at some of the evidence in **Handout 6** about the results of Kai's work. This includes the workshop process in Pune to define the Blue Behaviours, an example from the booklet on blue behaviours, an example email on 'blue behaviour of the month' plus the Blue Dollar action taken to spread the behaviours throughout the organization..

What lessons can you apply to your own experience, and take back to your own organisation, from Kai's global leadership challenges and responses?

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