

EMpower – The Emerging Markets Foundation

case study | not-for-profit

Developing a global workforce in a pandemic

Global non-profit organization wants to continue its training and development. It needs a program that can reach all offices, with diverse staff, and offer exceptional value.

Founded in 2000, EMpower has invested over US \$30 million in local organizations in 15 emerging market countries, to improve the skills and opportunities of young people living in precarious economic or social circumstances. Since 2000, EMpower has directly impacted the lives of over 500,000 marginalized youth, with an estimated one million young people, parents and community members also benefiting.

As far as people development goes, EMpower's challenge comes from the pandemic. Cynthia Steele, President and CEO, said, "Knowing that COVID was happening and that we wouldn't be able to bring people together, we were looking at an investment where all staff could do something where they would gain more self-awareness and could put that knowledge to use right away."

Business Challenges

- Training and developing staff when in-person training is impossible
- Finding creative ways to collectively train a global workforce

Company Profile

EMpower is a global grant-making foundation that supports and works closely with local organizations in emerging market countries focused on solutions that come from, engage, and benefit marginalised young people (age 10-24). They provide financial grants and other value-add support in three interconnected areas that are key to youth development: economic well-being, safe & healthy lives, and inclusive learning.

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Cynthia and the rest of the senior team had all taken the MBTI assessment earlier in their careers, using it as shorthand between themselves. That meant that MBTI training was a logical option.

“We were thinking, ‘wouldn’t this be a useful grounding for all staff to have more self-knowledge? To have more shared vocabulary, to work even better as teams?’”

Solution

EMpower chose the MBTI Essentials Virtual Workshop to address their global training need. Most people in the organization hadn’t done the MBTI assessment, so it offered an accessible entry point for everyone. 28 full-time staff—the entire international organization—attended.

With 11 participants from the US, five from the UK, five from India, five from Hong Kong, and one each from Singapore and Sierra Leone, the workshop needed to be a good use of everyone’s time. That point wasn’t lost on EMpower’s leaders.

“We have a 13-hour time difference,” Cynthia explained. “It’s 9pm at night for Hong Kong so they were on [the call] until 11pm. We have to think about what we’re asking of them every time we make an investment like this—it’s the opportunity cost of them missing an evening off and being drained.”

But she had no doubt the payoff would be worth it, and her people would benefit. “I learned about the MBTI framework in a different organization two decades ago. That organization made an investment in me and I’ve used the knowledge ever since. People can use this knowledge and take it wherever they like, including their home life. It’s portable.”

Solution

- Focused on MBTI framework to build self-awareness and improve teamwork across whole organization
- Used the MBTI Virtual Live Workshop to bring an international group together in a pandemic

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Results

When asked what was most valuable from the workshop, Shelbi Goldman, Global Operations Manager, had an immediate answer.

“One thing that was an a-ha moment for me, and I’ve heard this from other people afterwards, is that they sort of expected people to work with them in the way they [themselves] wanted to work. So, if they were super systematic, people expected their staff person or co-worker to work in that way too. I think a lot of people including myself realized that if that’s not how others are hardwired, then how can we use the way they are hardwired?”

For Cynthia, who already had experience of the MBTI assessment, it was a leadership and culture insight that stood out.

“One of the biggest things for me, and given my position in the company, is to take the 30,000-foot view. Where do we have gaps, where do we cluster, and what does that mean?”

“For example, there are five of us on the senior management team. Four of us are EN (Extraverted and Intuition) types. And that means it’s the Finance and Operations person who’s an IS (Introverted and Sensing) type and is holding down that corner of the grid,” she explains.

“I raise this because I think it’s really useful for us to think about the variety of ways we, as a team, talk and communicate. We’re culture carriers for the whole organization and I’m mindful of the N-S balance. At EMpower and other places I have worked, I’ve seen that senior leadership may have more intuitive (N) than sensing (S) types represented. I have preferences for Intuition and am comfortable with a huge amount of ambiguity. I’m happy to say of some matters, ‘let’s figure this out down the road, we don’t have to have everything pinned down now’ ... but this open-endedness can break other people out in hives! They want certainty, like ‘When am I going to know? Tell me the plan.’ And so, it’s a useful reminder to be attentive to that.”

Results

- Virtual delivery meant the whole organization could enjoy the benefits of team development
- Awareness of differences meant leaders better adjusted their communications with individuals and the entire organization

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The group was obviously looking forward to the training.

“People were telling me how much they were geeking out on it,” adds Cynthia. “Even before the workshop they were searching out their type and reading about it. It’s super useful and interesting.”

And the response to the workshop was overwhelmingly positive.

Part of this, Cynthia believes, is because the facilitator excelled in a virtual delivery format.

“I’d like to commend [her] facilitation because she was incredibly engaging...I know how hard that is to do for two hours, being really engaging and energetic, and keeping up with the comments and the “chat”. A lot of people noted that.”

“I really appreciate how she did encourage use of the chat box,” added Shelbi. “A lot of facilitators don’t because it’s distracting. But she kept people engaged.”

EMpower are keen to do a follow-up workshop, depending on resources and, of course, the pandemic. But they’re pleased with how the program went.

“Would I recommend this workshop to other businesses? Yes, for all the reasons above,” noted Shelbi.

“I think it really shines a light on how people can best work together, and it objectively shows people their strengths and how best to utilize them.”

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Shelbi Goldman,
Global Operations
Manager, EMpower

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