



Training in Advanced Moderation Skills: Conflict Awareness for Group Facilitation

DITSL, December 2016.



Within the frame of Trans-SEC's conflict prevention and management (CPM) system, a training course on "**Advanced moderation skills: conflict awareness for group facilitation**" took place at the German Institute for Tropical and Subtropical Agriculture (DITSL) on 1st and 2nd December, 2016.

The training was conducted by Dirk Sprenger for DITSL's Trans-SEC members (project leader, postdoctoral scientist, current and future MSc students) and other research group members, including a total of 11 participants with different levels of experience in the field of group facilitation. Since problematic situations often arise within group contexts, training on conflict awareness with an emphasis on strategies for dealing with conflict-related behaviour was especially useful for our participants. The training guided us through steps to enhance awareness of conflict situations and to recognise patterns of conflict escalation and communication. Through engagement with some examples from our own past experiences with group facilitation, we discussed case-specific techniques for addressing problems and mediating conflicts.





We began by working in small groups to address four introductory discussion points/questions set by the trainer:

- Please share some examples of our past experience of group facilitation and your role in these situations
- What worked or could be described as “good practice”? Which “success factors” contributed to the positive facilitation experience?
- Which challenges/difficulties are you facing when being a group facilitator?
- Against this background: what do you need from this workshop?

Small groups presented back on their discussions and this served as a basis for defining our expectations, needs and hopes regarding the training workshop.

The training proceeded with an introduction to conflict definitions, key patterns relating to positions, and needs, and common behaviours. A role play activity followed, whereby we engaged with a case study and explored the conflict from the perspective of different actors’ needs and positions.

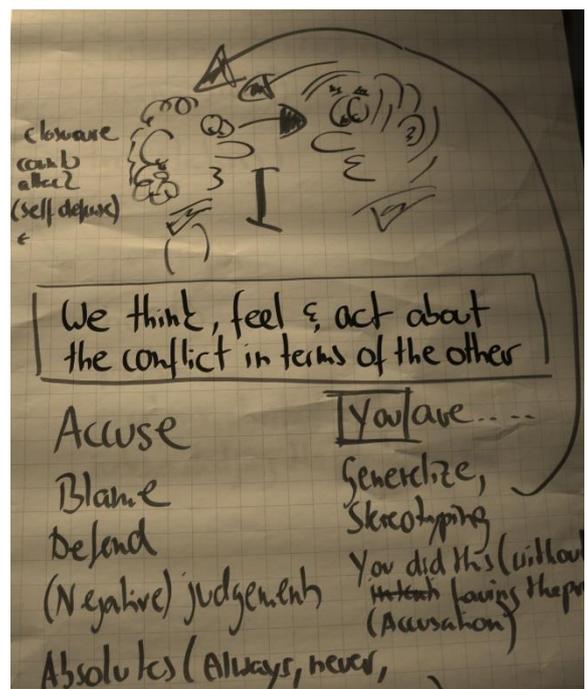
Conflict escalation dynamics were then discussed, based on Fritz Glasl:

- 1) Positions crystallise apart
- 2) Debate(not dialogue) ensues
- 3) Actions follow words
- 4) Coalitions are formed
- 5) Demasking, demonisation (significant point in the conflict)
- 6) Threats are issued
- 7) Limited attacks take place
- 8) Destroying the enemy
- 9) “Together into the abyss”

Communication patterns were then discussed (see photo right).

In pairs, we shared and reflected upon our own experiences of working with groups where such communication patterns were evidenced. We also shared ideas on how such communicative patterns could be disrupted to avoid conflict escalation. We learnt about the common problems of transference, projection and projective identification and reflected upon how we had experienced these phenomena during our own facilitation experiences.

The next topic addressed was the question of how to become aware of hidden conflicts/agendas within a group setting. Identified strategies included: close collaboration with local translators, observations of the non-verbal, taking time for one-to-one communication, paired facilitation and “listening to what is not said.”





Facilitation of group decision-making processes was raised as a particular challenge. We learnt about the value of sharing a range of options for decisions at the beginning of such a process, for example: complete agreement; agree with minor changes; strong concerns but open to discussion; veto (total non-acceptance of a proposed action/decision). Such a range of options opens up non-confrontational space for discussion in order to reach a group consensus.

Possible steps for facilitating a group decision-making processes were identified:

- 1) What are we going to decide?
- 2) A round of shared issues (positions and needs, fears)
- 3) Clarifications
- 4) Brain-storming of action possibilities
- 5) Puzzling the decision, fostering dialogues
- 6) Try for a decision
- 7) Corrections/changes based on concerns raised
- 8) Final decision

A detailed case study from a participant experience formed the background for a role play that then explored techniques for facilitating problematic multi-stakeholder meetings.



Different participants expressed their appreciation of the training and how useful it was to them:



“I especially enjoyed reflecting on my own experiences and learning about the experiences of others, as in that way I gained new inspiration and ideas for future facilitation activities”- Joanna Albrecht.

“I enjoyed the atmosphere created through the facilitator and all the participants; everyone was able to share their needs, experiences and points-of-view equally, which was a best example of group work without conflicts!”- Hannah Grund-Magomu.

“The training provoked critical reflection on my own past experiences of difficult situations and feelings when facilitating a group. It allowed for a deeper level of understanding about behaviour patterns; why we act in particular ways and how this can lead to conflict and negative emotions. This time for reflection was really valuable to me; reflecting on a facilitation experience from six years ago, only now do I see the dynamics of projection, projective identification and transference that took place”- Pamela Ngwenya.

“As a facilitator I need to reflect on my own role and my needs as a facilitator and I have to be transparent with these needs and my role towards the group”- Hannah Grund-Magomu.

“I most enjoyed role plays and continuous illustration of theory by using real examples. Role plays helped a lot to illustrate "real" conflictive situations of multi-stakeholder communication and related problems. Further, the role plays were very useful for the following discussions about communication patterns, possible ways of facilitating conflict situations, and how difficult this is in real situations”- Markus Frank.

“One lesson relates to the importance as a facilitator to reflect continuously on the own role and to the recognition that the facilitator is not the one who solves the conflict (often expected by the group), but that it is the group itself. Another lesson is that conflict situations are often rooted in malfunctioning of human communication and related to the *persons* involved and not in the first instance related to the *subject* of discussion. Accordingly, by improving group communication through effective facilitation, group dynamics and conflict solving capacity can be improved”- Markus Frank .

“The (first) role play showed me how difficult it is to come from positions to needs and how important this step is in conflict resolution”- Joana Albrecht

We concluded the meeting with expressions of further needs for additional in-depth trainings on facilitation of problematic multi-stakeholder groups and constructive communication strategies.