

Basics of Dialogue Facilitation

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Preface

Dialogue – the meaningful and meaning-creating exchange of perceptions and opinions – is one of the methods people most frequently turn to when addressing conflictive issues. Approaches like mediation and negotiation, often used to work out differences on a political and social level, incorporate elements of dialogue. Yet whether one is dealing with a high-level national dialogue like the ones held in Yemen or Sudan in recent years, with regional meetings or community gatherings, it is crucial in conflict settings – especially those with a potential to turn violent – to go about convening and holding dialogue meetings carefully. Despite the myriad of handbooks and reflections on good dialogue, the question of how to prepare for and set up successful dialogues remains pressing and intriguing to practitioners and scholars alike.

The preface to the second Arabic edition of this booklet describes the challenges and appeal of dialogue in such virulent conflict settings vividly: “The people and societies of the so-called Middle East are currently living a period of deep insecurity. Power struggles and competing visions about political, economic, religious, social and cultural order have triggered destructive cycles of exclusion, violence and war. State and religious institutions as well as tribal customary systems, which were mediating and managing conflicting interests in the past, have lost influence and are subsequently weakened. Against this bleak background, it seems that extremist voices will run the show. However, there are also numerous counter-voices that call for reform and moderation, for inclusive institutions, for participatory development approaches, new ‘social contracts’ and religious and cultural tolerance. Instead of resorting to exclusion and violence, these voices would rather opt for dialogue as a constructive means to [balance] competing interests. In fact, in the last years there has been a growing tendency among parties, movements and groups to call for or to initiate national, local and regional dialogues. This is indeed an encouraging development that builds ... on an understanding that some form of consensus is required to reach mutually acceptable solutions.”

This small booklet aims at providing some guidance, inspiration and practical tools for those who are engaged in the planning and facilitation of dialogue processes or who are advocating for dialogue as a means for solving conflict. Initially, the publication started out as a handout, sharing insights into setting up and conducting constructive dialogues around contentious issues specifically in contexts of violence-prone conflict. Norbert Ropers, together with numerous insider mediators and external experts, drew it together based on joint decades of experience in accompanying and facilitating such constructive conversations and negotiations. Its audience were first and foremost local practitioners in Southern Thailand, where Norbert Ropers’ most recent engagement takes place. The “handout” subsequently met with great interest and has been translated into Arabic and in parts into Spanish and Thai. Among the wealth of works on dialogue facilitation and methodology, its simplicity and its focus on working in settings of political and sometimes violence-prone conflict settings have set it apart.

Our hope is to preserve the special features of the initial handout with this modestly expanded version, while adding more depth and hands-on experience. We have been able to draw on the work of dialogue-facilitating colleagues in various regions of the world. We thank our colleagues in Berghof Foundation’s Caucasus, Latin America, Middle East and North Africa programmes, its Dialogue, Mediation and Peace Support Structures programme as well as its Peace Education and Global Learning programme for generously sharing stories, tips and tricks from their practice. The publication remains geared towards an audience of dialogue practitioners all around the world, whose work on peacefully and constructively addressing and transforming deep divisions and contentious issues we commend and wish to support.

Bangkok, Tübingen & Berlin, September 2017
Norbert Ropers with Beatrix Austin, Anna Köhler & Anne Kruck

1 Introduction to Dialogue Facilitation

“Nobody is as wise as we altogether” – African Proverb

1.1 Defining Dialogue

The modern meaning of dialogue has its origin in antiquity and the Middle Ages. The term is now primarily defined as a conversation between two or more people characterised by openness, honesty and genuine listening. Taken from the Greek *diá* and *lógo*, it can be interpreted as the “flow of words” or “meaning” created by more than one person.

In contrast to the terms “discussion” and “debate”, which focus primarily on the *content* of a conversation, the word “dialogue” places equal emphasis on the *relationship* between the persons involved. Another difference is that “debate” often includes a competitive component to underline the superiority of one opinion, while “dialogue” implies mutual understanding and the aim to identify common ground. In the reality of conversations in and on conflicts, though, the modes of discussion, debate and dialogue will often be mixed and it needs good facilitation skills to make the participants aware of this and help enable them to move between them constructively.



Difference between Debate and Dialogue

	Debate	Dialogue
Goal/Purpose	The goal is to “win” the argument by affirming one’s own views and discrediting other views.	The goal is to understand different perspectives and learn about other views.
Participants’ approach	People listen to others to find flaws in their arguments.	People listen to others to understand how their experiences shape their belief.
Dealing with others’ views	<p>People critique the experiences of others as distorted and invalid.</p> <p>People appear to be determined not to change their own views on the issue.</p> <p>People speak based on assumption made about others’ positions and motivations.</p> <p>People oppose each other and attempt to prove each other wrong.</p>	<p>People accept the experiences of others as real and valid.</p> <p>People appear to be somewhat open to expanding their understanding of the issue.</p> <p>People speak primarily from their own understanding and experience.</p> <p>People work together toward common understanding.</p>
Role of emotions	Strong emotions like anger are often used to intimidate the other side.	Strong emotions like anger and sadness are appropriate when they convey the intensity of an experience or belief.

Source: Lisa Schirch & David Camp: *The Little Book of Dialogue for Difficult Subjects*. Good Books 2007, 9.

The essence of a successful dialogue is that it is a face-to-face interaction between members with different backgrounds, convictions and opinions, in which they respect each other as human beings and are prepared to listen to each other deeply enough to inspire some kind of change of attitudes or learning which will contribute to consensus building.¹

¹ For more information on the concept of dialogue and elements of promising dialogue, see Chapter 4 of the Berghof Glossary on Conflict Transformation (Berghof Foundation 2012).

1.2 Good Practices of Dialogue

Dialogue is an essential tool, which has been used for thousands of years to address joint problems and guide collaborative social change. In the course of its long history, many variations of this kind of participatory problem-solving have been developed. Examining these variations makes it possible to identify some good practices, which help create an atmosphere conducive to effective dialogue. These good practices are suitable for direct dialogues as well as for facilitated dialogues with the support of a third party:

- ≡ *Size of the Dialogue groups:* Size of dialogue groups: The very idea of a dialogue is that all of its participants have a fair chance to personally contribute with substantive remarks to the communication. At the same time, this should happen within a reasonable time frame. This means, in most cases, that dialogues in groups with more than 30 participants become rather difficult. In these situations it is advisable to find creative ways to form break-out groups for at least some parts of the dialogue process to enable more participation (see *Example “Big Groups”* opposite). To allow for a lively exchange of perspectives a minimum number of participants, often set at eight to ten persons, should be involved. This minimum, however, depends on the spectrum of different opinions to be taken into account. Some professionals describe a group size between 12 and 25 persons as ideal for in-depth dialogues.
- ≡ *Spaces for dialogues:* A dialogue’s setting and space are often determined by the local conditions and cultural standards. They can range from open-air spaces under a tree in a tropical village to air-conditioned conference rooms in a five-star hotel. Important are the following conditions:
 - ≡ that all participants can have direct eye-contact with each other,
 - ≡ that they can listen to each other easily, and
 - ≡ that there is no hierarchical difference in the seating arrangement between the participants (with the potential exception of a different chair for a chair-person or a VIP-guest).

The ideal seating arrangement is a circle with one row, the second best one with two or maximum three rows. In case that this is not possible, any arrangement which allows easy eye-contact among all participants is better than a “theatre” arrangement. In some cases the “cabaret” solution with round tables can be useful, but then it will be necessary to rotate the sharing of tables.
- ≡ *Refreshments:* Participants usually appreciate it when the organisers or hosts provide some refreshments within the dialogue room like water, tea or coffee.
- ≡ *Time management, sessions & breaks:* Most dialogues are organised in the shape of conferences, seminars or workshops that are structured into consecutive sessions with breaks in-between. Each culture has its own standards with respect to punctuality, the lengths of the sessions and the breaks. Facilitators should act in accordance with these standards. Breaks should be taken seriously and shortening them to make up for prolonged sessions should be avoided. They serve important functions for trust and relationship-building, can be used to clarify misunderstandings and sometimes offer opportunities for sorting out deadlocks. (Some dialogue experts have even described a particular method of dialogue organisation, the “Open Space Method”, as a kind of “permanent coffee break”.)

Further reading

Juanita Brown & David Isaacs (2005). *The World Café: Shaping our Futures through Conversations that Matter.* Oakland/California: Berrett-Koehler.
Harrison Owen (2008). *Open Space Technology: User’s Guide.* Oakland/California: Berrett-Koehler.
 Marike Blunck et al. (2017). *National Dialogue Handbook. A Guide for Practitioners.* Berlin: Berghof Foundation.

Example “Big groups” – Yemen’s National Dialogue Process 2013/2014

In certain political and societal contexts, **large-group dialogues** may be needed to effectively address shared problems and build consensus. One example of such a large-scale dialogue is the Yemeni National Dialogue Conference (NDC, March 2013 – January 2014). Its main purpose was to re-establish consensus about the foundations of the Yemeni state and institutional system, to develop comprehensive recommendations for a new constitution and to overcome deep divisions between the Yemeni parties and main constituencies. In accordance with the immensity of this task, a number of challenges and dilemmas inherent to large scale dialogue processes had to be addressed. These included, among others:

- ≡ **Balancing inclusivity and effectiveness:** The objectives of the Yemeni National Dialogue required that all groups were represented in a balanced way based on clear criteria of participation, selection mechanisms and carefully designed working methods. Ultimately a total of 565 participants discussed over a period of more than ten months, a process which was complex to organise and resource-intensive. However, the inclusivity of the process was key for its legitimacy after more than 30 years of authoritarian rule. All main political parties, movements and groups of Yemeni society were represented in the dialogue, with quota for participation of Southerners (50%), women (30%) and youth (20%).

- ≡ **Combining various formats:** To keep the discussions manageable despite the large group of participants, various formats were combined (plenary sessions, thematic discussion tables, parallel working groups, informal problem-solving committees). A total of nine thematic working groups was formed to discuss the different topics related to state-building, rights, development, security, transitional justice, the South, Saada, the independence of institutions and good governance. To ensure overall coherence, working group sessions were alternated with plenary phases where the status of discussion in the working groups was presented, shared and discussed. The process was steered by a Presidium comprising representatives of the main political parties and movements along with the President. In addition, committees were formed for overcoming deadlock over key issues in the process. Ad hoc committees furthermore provided a space where things could actually be negotiated between the parties beyond the dialogue format where working groups with too many people sometimes made it difficult to discuss “hot” topics and where parties were not represented at the “right level” to solve difficult issues.

- ≡ **Structures for effective preparation and process support:** intense preparations and mandated structures to plan the overall design of the dialogue ensured that the complexity of the topics could be handled. The technical committee, for example, worked on criteria for participation and selection mechanisms for the representatives of the various parties and movements prior to the dialogue. It also suggested confidence-building measures to facilitate the participation of all components (although these were never fully implemented). The general secretariat of the NDC ensured information exchange and documentation of outcomes throughout the dialogue; it further supported outreach and communication to allow for an indirect participation of wider constituencies (although outreach remained limited). It also facilitated coordination with international donors.

Additional challenges typical of large-scale dialogue – which were also apparent in the Yemeni process – relate to **agenda-setting** and **sequencing**. Starting with less contested issues to ease pressure on the dialogue ultimately led to a situation where difficult issues had to be addressed in the end with very little time to ensure sufficient consensus. The Yemeni National Dialogue further suffered from a lack of effective implementation of confidence-building measures, adding to the deep mistrust which had prevailed between the parties that could not be overcome during the dialogue. In addition, the mechanisms for implementation of the outcomes and the transitional architecture had not been sufficiently clarified, contributing to derailing the entire transition process.

Nonetheless, the Yemeni National Dialogue succeeded in forging an agreement about some of the key elements of the Yemeni state-building process across the political spectrum and remains a major reference point for the Yemeni parties also after two years of war.

Sonja Neuweiler, Programme Co-Director, Middle East and North Africa, Berghof Foundation.

1.3 Dialogue Facilitators

Demanding dialogues – for example a sustained dialogue with a large group of participants – are in most cases facilitated by persons who have no direct stakes in the outcome or who are obliged to stay neutral, impartial or multi-partial with respect to the issues. This can be the case when persons belonging to one or the other dialogue or negotiation party are asked to form a joint facilitation team, a procedure which, for example, has been widely used in the ceasefire talks in Myanmar. Many professionals with experience in dialogue facilitation argue that a good facilitation team should consist of insider and outsider facilitators. On the one hand, it is useful to have persons with deep knowledge of the history, culture and personality dynamics of the situation – the insider facilitators. It can, on the other hand, be just as important to have some distance to the situation and to bring new perspectives into the discourse – abilities held by outsider facilitators.

The best solution for demanding dialogues is, therefore, a mixed team of facilitators. Further, the facilitators should, if possible, establish an effective mechanism of peer-to-peer-consultations to support each other in their work.

The basic requirements for dialogue facilitators include the following:

- ≡ *Neutrality/multi-partiality:* Facilitators are brought in because the parties see the need for someone who has no decision-making authority to support their efforts in finding a common solution in a fair manner. Their role is sometimes described as “neutral” (with respect to the issues at stake) and/or as “impartial” or “multi-partial” (i.e. with either equidistance or the same empathetic openness to all parties).
- ≡ *Strong listening, reframing & summarising skills:* Facilitators need to be able to listen carefully during all phases of the process, to summarise long statements and occasionally reframe statements put forward in an aggressive language that makes it difficult for others to open up to the message. Sometimes, they may also have to mirror statements which indicate a strong emotional reaction in the speaker, but which are articulated only in passing or in more modest words – here, the facilitator may do well to amplify the emotional message.
- ≡ *Formulating good questions:* An effective dialogue process is one in which participants open up to each other and move towards a broader and deeper understanding of each other. This requires asking questions that encourage them to share the background and underlying needs, fears and interests of their statements and proposals. Particularly helpful are “circular questions”, which focus on the context and the perspectives of outside persons (→ see Chapter 3b *Facilitation Tools*).
- ≡ *Personal integrity and awareness:* Good facilitators combine personal integrity with a strong awareness of their own strengths and weaknesses as facilitators. Facilitators are often the focus and the projection-surface of what is going on in the group. It is important that facilitators are aware of this and know how to handle the implications. One basic way of ensuring that one is able to do so is to work in mixed facilitation teams. Ideally, one team member will be able to observe group dynamics and facilitator-group-dynamics and to talk through difficult situations arising in daily or ad-hoc debriefing sessions.
- ≡ *Understanding the group development as a dynamic and holistic process:* Good facilitators are aware that ups and downs are normal phenomena in group settings. Moments of hard confrontation and of mutual avoidance are often less due to personal traits. Rather, they are an expression of the group’s struggle with its efforts to generate a commonly agreed outcome.

An Example for Reframing

In one dialogue process facilitated in the Southern Caucasus, two groups were planning to meet on neutral territory in Austria. Painstaking preparation had gone into drawing up mutually agreeable participants' lists. On the eve of the meeting, when one of the delegations had already arrived, word transpired that an un-vetted participant was going to arrive with the other delegation who proved deeply problematic for the group already there. They threatened, and saw no alternative, to walking out. After long hours of nightly discussions with the facilitation team, a face-saving way of reframing the meeting was discovered: rather than a dialogue session – with all its political implications – the meeting was framed as a study seminar, hence making the presence of the afore rejected delegation member less problematic and allowing the meeting to go ahead.

Dr. Norbert Ropers, Senior Advisor, South-East Asia, Berghof Foundation.

2 How to Design Dialogues

2.1 Ground Rules of Dialogue

To ensure a common understanding of the way the dialogue will be organised and facilitated, it is important to agree on a joint set of ground rules with all participants. This should be done at the very beginning of the first dialogue session and should be explicitly confirmed by all participants. These ground rules should be disseminated in written form, so that participants and facilitators can refer to them whenever necessary during the dialogue process. It is also possible to add new ground rules at a later stage, for example on speaking time in case too many lengthy comments by few people provoke impatience or withdrawal by others.

Ground rules for dialogues relate to three basic categories:

1. The mode of mutual interaction and communication in the dialogue sessions.
2. The way in which information from these sessions is shared outside (particularly the understanding of confidentiality)
3. The practical aspects to ensure effective sessions (→ see Chapter 1.2 *Good Practices of Dialogue*).

Sometimes, the rules for decision-making, i.e. to reach a consensus at the end of a dialogue process, are also called ground rules.

With respect to the first category, *interaction and communication*, the following ground rules can be helpful:

- ≡ Dialogue means to listen to, to understand and to avoid interrupting other participants.
- ≡ Dialogue means to remain open-minded to the perspectives of other participants.
- ≡ Dialogue means to separate what we hear from other persons from our judgement on why this person makes a certain statement. Many misunderstandings are based on the temptation to interpret the motives why someone makes a statement.
- ≡ Dialogue means to focus first on interests and needs instead of solutions. Many dialogues fail because the participants rush too early to conclusions and solutions.

With respect to the second category, it is particularly important to clarify the issue of *confidentiality*. Participants in a political dialogue, obviously, have to report back to and link with their constituencies and there should be a sufficient level of transparency of the process to the outside. However, experience has shown that it is often not helpful to disclose exactly who has said what. For this reason, the Chatham House Rule is applied in many dialogues, though most often is limited to the part which relates to the personal attribution of statements. Even in cases in which this ground rule is violated by participants, it remains important for the facilitator to emphasise the rule's importance and to reiterate their commitment to this agreement.

Chatham House Rules

“When a meeting, or part thereof, is held under the Chatham House Rule, participants are free to use the information received, but neither the identity nor the affiliation of the speaker(s), nor that of any other participant, may be revealed.”

Source: <https://www.chathamhouse.org/about/chatham-house-rule#>

Altogether, it is wise for the facilitators to set the tone with these rules right at the beginning of a dialogue session and to find a good way to address ways of dealing with violations in advance.



An Example for the Use of Ground Rules

In the civic nonviolent education project in Jordan, we have developed, together with our partners, rules for a culture of dialogue based on Friedrich Glasl’s escalation (and de-escalation) model. This work starts with children and their teachers in schools.

One teacher told us that the poster is now hanging in her classroom and that the students themselves agreed together not to go any further than step 4 in the escalation. And they remind each other of the agreement if there is a danger of breach.

Principles that help to avoid violence:

1. Dialogue

We are ready for conversation and to listen to each other.

2. Renounce violence

We do not resort to violence and we renounce violence in all its forms.

3. Empathy

We understand the others opinion and listen to them.

4. Confidence

It is our business to build trust between us.

5. Diversity

We are fully aware that every human being is different from the other.

6. Similarities

We are looking for common values.

7. Fair play

We agree on fair rules for peaceful coexistence.

8. Support

We need mediation in some cases.

9. Reconciliation

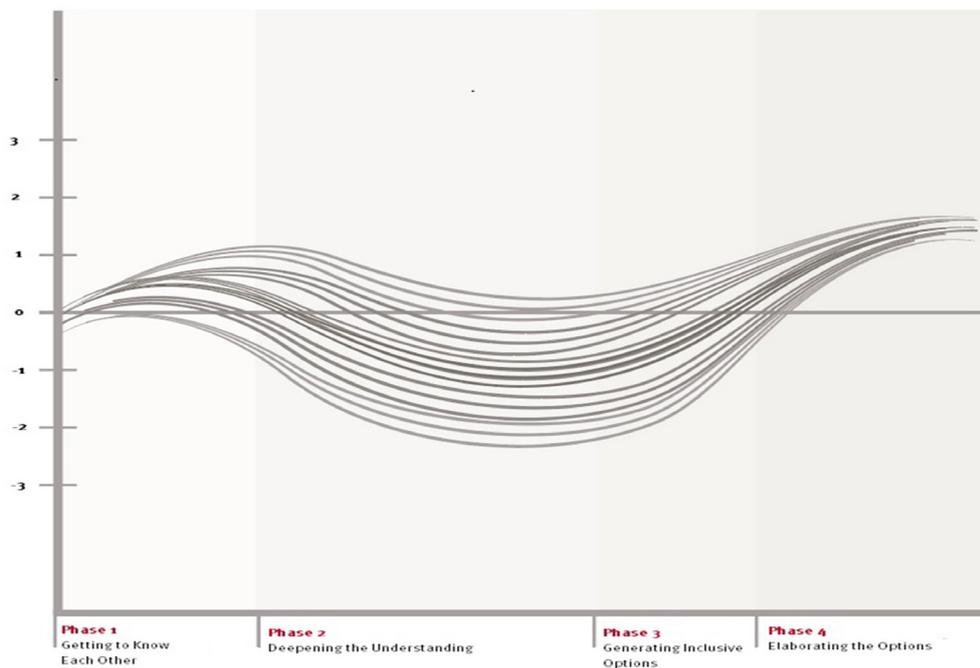
We are fully ready to recognise our mistakes and accept apologies.

2.2 Design & Sequencing of Dialogue Processes

Most dialogues on contentious issues are organised as time-table led processes with consecutive sequences of different types of engagement and outcomes.

From a practical point of view, it is very important to understand the need for a proper preparation of the group sessions. One of the first issues is to draft the agenda for the individual sessions as well as the overall, sustained dialogue process. To generate a promising, relationship-building and trust-building atmosphere it is useful to start with topics on which at least some degree of procedural consensus can be achieved with some ease. More difficult issues should be addressed at a later stage. Altogether, the development of the dialogue can be visualised as a “Flow of Divergence” from expanding divergence to increasing convergence: Figure 1 illustrates the general observation that at the early stages of dialogue, there may be less divergence and more positive expectations and expressions of harmony. Over time, the opinions differentiate and issues broaden (complexify) – both in a positive and negative sense. Towards the end of a dialogue, and often aided by good facilitation, issues and opinions converge again and, ideally, emerge in a general consensus.

Figure 1: The flow of divergence and consensus-building



Inspired by ‘The Flow of Divergence’, Marianne M. Bojer et al.: *Mapping Dialogue. Essential Tools for Social Change*. Taos Institute 2008, 21.

The steps of joint dialogue sessions can be separated into distinct phases:

Four distinct phases of joint dialogue sessions

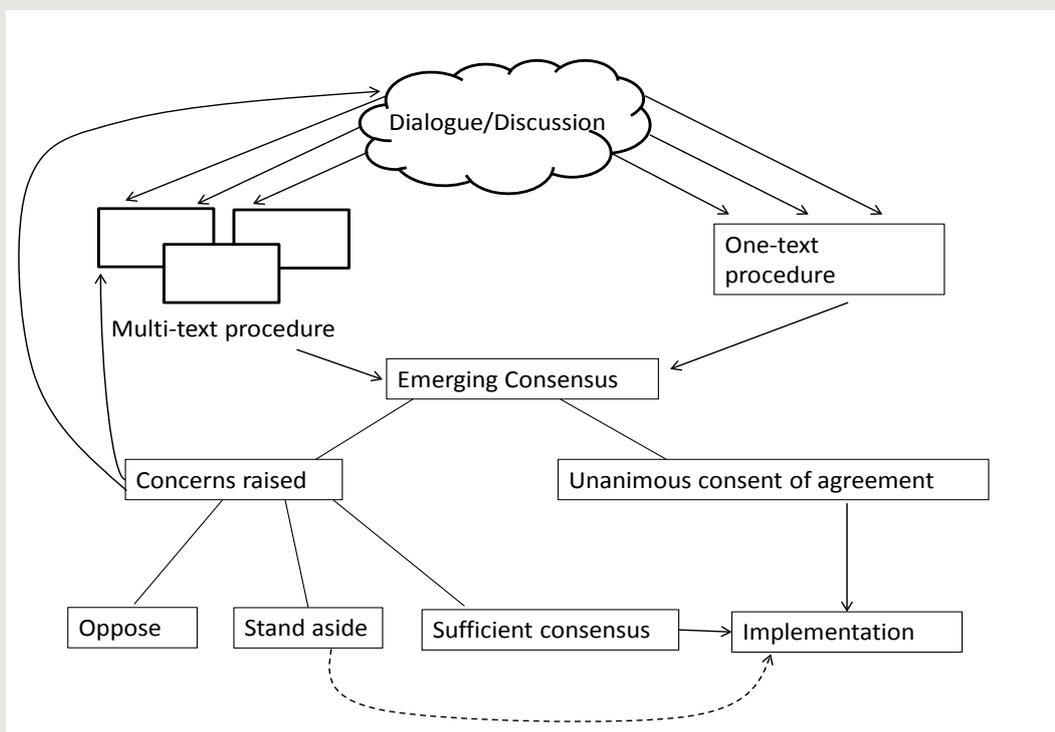
Phases	Description
<p>Phase 1 Getting to Know Each Other / Elaborating the Issues</p>	<p>The participants elaborate the issues to be dealt with in the respective working group and to give all parties/representatives the opportunity to present their perspective on these issues. One useful tool for this is the visualisation of issues and perspectives. But be careful: Do <i>not</i> write down <i>positions</i>! It might become difficult to revise these positions later on. It is better to frame concerns, interests and needs in a way that allows them to be addressed in different ways. Another recommendation is to summarise statements regularly in a format that makes the speaking party feel acknowledged and recognised but without offending other parties.</p>
<p>Phase 2 Deepening of Understanding and Sharing of Perspectives</p>	<p>Only after all the parties/representatives have put forward their perspectives and opinions on the issues at stake should you move on to the second phase, the deepening of understanding and the sharing of perspectives. This is the most difficult phase in all dialogues but it is also crucial for moving towards a common ground and for triggering compromises. Helpful in this phase are tools and methods that acknowledge the underlying feelings, concerns, fears and needs of all parties and encourage mutual understanding. These include open ended and circular questions, reframing, mirroring and triangular dialogues.</p>
<p>Phase 3 Generating Inclusive Options</p>	<p>A good indicator for the successful sharing of perspectives is when a party/representative expresses his/her surprise about an insight or softens the stance on a controversial topic. This can be the starting point for the third phase which focuses on generating inclusive options. During this phase it is crucial not to evaluate these options immediately, but to create an atmosphere conducive to open-minded brainstorming and to encourage a broad spectrum of creative alternatives.</p>
<p>Phase 4 Discussing and Evaluating Options</p>	<p>Only after phase three is concluded, it is recommended to move to the fourth phase of discussing and evaluating the options. To prepare this phase it is useful to put together a list of criteria that are most suitable with respect to a reasonable consensus.</p>

2.3 Guiding Consensus Building

The main aim of comprehensive dialogue processes is to achieve a broad-based consensus including all stakeholders and to overcome the traditional practice of adversarial decision making through majority vote (like the famous “Robert’s Rules of Order”² from the 19th century in the US). The particular method of *consensus building* was developed in the 1980s and is now widely used for public policy conflicts in many democratic states.³ Its wholesale application for the guidance of consensus building in deeply divided societies is limited, but some of its tools and procedures can be very helpful.

- ≡ *Defining consensus*: In the international ISO standard⁴ it is defined as a “general agreement, characterised by the absence of sustained opposition to substantial issues by an important part of the concerned interests and by a process that involves seeking to take into account the views of all parties concerned and to reconcile any conflicting arguments”.
- ≡ *Active consensus*: It requires that the participants in a dialogue formally express their support for the consensus. In the alternative case, a passive consensus, participants can abstain and a consensus is reached when they do not actively oppose it.

Figure 2: Applying methods for consensus-building



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² “Robert’s Rules of Order” contain a comprehensive set of rules to guide ‘deliberative assemblies’ like legislative assemblies. They are widely used in the English speaking world and countries with a common law tradition. The first edition, written by General Henry Martyn Robert, was published in 1876; the 11th dates from 2011.

³ The most famous resource is now Lawrence Susskind’s monumental *Consensus Building Handbook*. A useful online resource can be found on the website of Seeds for Change, a UK-based network of non-profit training and support co-operatives, which help people organise for action and positive social change (www.seedsforchange.org.uk/consensus).

⁴ ISO, or International Organisation for Standardisation, is an independent and non-governmental organisation that develops, through its members, international standards “for products, services and systems, to ensure quality, safety and efficiency” (www.iso.org/iso/home/about.htm).

- ≡ Another term frequently used is *sufficient consensus*. It is reached when a majority of representatives of all major dialogue groups agrees with a decision. A *qualified consensus* constitutes a decision that is adopted when a certain number of participants agree. In the case of the National Dialogue in Yemen the required quotas for a qualified consensus were 90 % or 75 % of the participants, depending on the issue being decided upon (→ see *Example “Big Groups”* above).
- ≡ *Managing consensus building*: The need for unanimous consensus building on procedural issues from the beginning is crucial for the success of the dialogue. With respect to substantive issues, consensus building should only come up in the second phase of the process (→ see Chapter 2.2. *Design and Sequencing of Dialogue Processes*). The best approach is to work collaboratively and multi-partially on all proposals. A well-established model for this is the *single-text-procedure*. It recommends that all proposals, including controversial ones, should be integrated into one text and that this text should then be revised step-by-step to gain widespread approval. Another method is the so-called *common space*, which includes the stakeholders in a continuous, well-documented and transparent process of dialoguing options for consensus-building.
- ≡ *Managing dissent*: Various communities with an egalitarian tradition have developed fine-tuned ways to express dissent without blocking a joint decision right away. They can, for example, declare specific reservations or “stand aside”, meaning that they disagree personally, but are willing to let a vast majority have their say. Another method is the use of coloured cards to facilitate the consensus building process, with the colours indicating different kinds of comments by the speakers.

Further reading

Lawrence Susskind et al. (eds.) (1999). *The Consensus Building Handbook: A Comprehensive Guide to Reaching Agreement*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Seeds for Change. *Materials for Consensus Building*. UK. <http://seedsforchange.org.uk/consensus>.

3 Toolbox for Dialogue Facilitators

3.1 Dealing with Difficult Situations and Deadlocks

In all dialogues that deal with protracted conflicts and periods of fundamental transition, it is “normal” that the process of communication will occasionally run into difficult situations: Participants may become angry, interrupt each other vehemently, claim that they have been offended by statements from other participants, leave the room in anger, or – worse – threaten each other indirectly with violent action. Similar challenges can appear in the context of dialoguing – or rather discussing – contested issues and deep disagreements. In these situations, the facilitators might not even observe hostile behaviour, but it becomes obvious that the discussion moves into a deadlock or a blockade by one or both parties. For these cases, it is helpful if the facilitators have a spectrum of tools at their disposal to deal with the situation constructively.

- ≡ *First-aid empathy:* Participants who express strong emotions, anger and aggression in particular, should be directly addressed by voicing their feelings (“You are really upset and would like to leave immediately?”) and by referring to the needs or fears behind these feelings (“You want that some concrete steps are finally taken to address this problem?”). The facilitator then works to identify concrete ways forward (for example: “What could these steps be?”). Do not take sides with these participants and keep your multi-party distance, but acknowledge the strong feelings.
- ≡ *Remind participants of the principles and ground rules of dialogues:* Time and again, communication on contested issues will slide towards discussion and debate, sometimes in a heated fashion in which the participants only throw arguments at each other, interrupt each other, or start lecturing each other while some retreat into silence. In these moments the facilitators can ask: “Are we still in a mode of dialogue with each other, or how would you describe this mode of communication?” This situation can then be used to remind the participants of the ground rules agreed upon at the beginning, or to introduce new ones.
- ≡ *Have creative breaks:* Sometimes, it is also advisable to break a bogged-down situation with the simple suggestion to go into the next tea and coffee break. During this break either the facilitator or other participants can engage with the main protagonists and mitigate or at least de-escalate the controversy.
- ≡ *Establish a sound knowledge base accessible for all participants:* Many of the contested issues which will come up in the dialogue have been addressed in the past and in other contexts. It is, therefore, advisable to collect information on these issues and how they were addressed in other contexts. This information should be easily available, which requires an adequate infrastructure.
- ≡ *Mobilise external expertise:* Similar to the preceding point, it will be helpful to utilise the available expertise among scholars and practitioners who have dealt with similar challenges in the past. For example, when you are holding a series of dialogue or negotiation meetings and are preparing a roadmap for the dialogue process, you can negotiate with the represented parties to invite external experts for sessions on certain topics.
- ≡ *Initiate multiparty deadlock-breaking team(s):* As a kind of safety-net, it is advisable to establish at least one sub-group among the working groups that includes persons with strong communicative and problem-solving skills and to ask them to function as a deadlock-breaking team.

- ≡ *Introduce creative tools into the dialogue, e.g. “fishbowl” sessions:* A widely used tool for deepening dialogues is the fishbowl session. The facilitators invite a small number of participants into an inner circle, while the other participants stay in the outer circle. During the fishbowl session, only the persons in the inner circle are allowed to talk. This tool allows focusing the dialogue on a small number of participants with a particular role or interest in the topic at stake. It helps to facilitate a more in-depth exchange of statements and obliges the outside participants to concentrate on comparative listening. It can be useful for exploring intra-party as well as inter-party perspectives. To create an outlet for the outer circle, one chair in the inner circle can be left empty, enabling the people in the outer circle to come in for a particular contribution (→ see also *Figure 3* and Chapter 3.2 *Facilitation Tools* below).
- ≡ *Take self-care measures:* It is easy for facilitators to become overwhelmed or insecure in difficult situations. In contexts of violence-prone political or social conflict, it is also common for facilitators to become targets of the tensions and projections of those caught up in the conflict. It is all the more important to stay grounded when the situation heats up. To prepare yourself for staying calm and acting intentionally – rather than reactively – in such situations, you can learn and practice various techniques and skills.
- ≡ With respect to self-care, another basic recommendation is to work with a *mixed facilitation team* and to make sure to get to know each other’s strengths and weaknesses. As a result you can hand over the facilitation to another team member when the situation threatens to overwhelm you or get out of your control. It is also advisable to designate one team member as an observer for each session. This person can focus on observing group dynamics and can serve an early warning function when unforeseen tensions arise within the group. The observer can also provide valuable insights for the planning and adjustment of subsequent dialogue sessions at daily debriefings (→ see also Chapter 1.3 *Dialogue Facilitators*).

Further reading

Bettye Pruitt and Philip Thomas (eds.) (2007). *Democratic Dialogue – A Handbook for Practitioners*. Appendix 2: Process Options and Process Tools – An Overview (pp. 104-137). Published by CIDE, IDEA, OAS and UNDP. www.idea.int/publications/democratic_dialogue/.

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3.2 Facilitation Tools

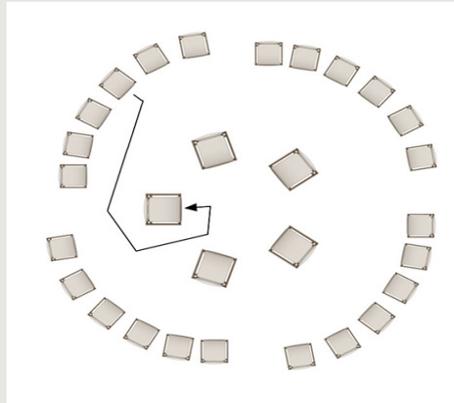
All good dialogues need their own specific combination of tools. Which ones you select depends primarily on the purpose, the mandate, the timeframe and the context of the dialogue. You also have to take into account various other aspects, including the group's size, its cultural background and power differentials within, as well as very practical aspects such as the venue and the facilities where the dialogue sessions take place. Tools for facilitation comprise modes of communication by the facilitators with the participants as well as methods for organising the overall group communication. The table below includes a short summary for selected tools which belong to the basic repertoire of facilitation.

In contexts of violence-prone political or social conflict, it is necessary to choose the tools carefully and ensure that they are appropriate for the group and conflict at hand. Less can be more in such situations, however, it is also possible to introduce new perspectives by introducing a somewhat less familiar facilitation style at crucial points, providing something akin to a paradoxical intervention.

Facilitation Tools

“Fishbowl”

A “fishbowl” is a tool to allow a smaller group of persons involved in a dialogue to form an “inner circle” within the larger “outside circle”. The participants in the inner circle talk to each other, while those in the outer circle are listening. The advantage is that particular topics can be addressed in more depth in a smaller group. The method can be used for talks within one party to make others aware of the broad spectrum of opinions within that party (intra-party) or for inter-group conversations with only a few representatives. An “open fishbowl” has one empty chair in the inner circle which allows one outsider at a time to come into the circle. A “closed fishbowl” has no empty chair.



“World Café”

The “World Café” dialogue concept was made popular by Juanita Brown and David Isaacs in 1995 (see www.theworldcafe.com). According to its name, a room is set up like a café with people sitting in small groups around tables. The starting point has to be a clear purpose which is broken down into various sub-themes which are addressed at different tables. The participants are invited to join any table according to their interest, to connect to people, to share experiences and ideas and to generate new collective wisdom. Some of them might stay at one table while others connect to more than one table.

This method can be particularly helpful at the beginning of a session with a large group to understand complex issues, their inter-connectedness and to prepare a more systematic separation of the sub-groups needed for consensus-building.

Facilitation Tools

Description

Active Listening and Speaking

Paraphrasing: The facilitator listens to what has been said and restates it in his/her words. The purpose is to put it into context or to clarify implications or misunderstandings which have not been mentioned. Sometimes parties are more prepared to listen to a third party concerning an argument than when the same argument is put forward by their opponents.

Reframing: Reframing is a basic tool for facilitating conflictual issues: Statements with a hostile or biased message are reframed to become acceptable for the opponents (also called “detoxification”).

Summarising: Long statements by participants are shortened by the facilitator to emphasise their essence. At the same time this procedure allows the facilitator to paraphrase and reframe some of the content.

Examples

Example: “We will never give that land back!” – “Of course, it once belonged to you. But who cultivated the ground? Built the irrigation system? It was a desert and now it is a jewel and an adopted home to many people!”

Paraphrased*:

Variation I “So, you say there are different criteria to figure out the ownership of the land: One is the history of ownership. Secondly you emphasise the effort of cultivation and irrigation. And thirdly you point out that only by cultivation real value was brought to the land. And furthermore you raised a new issue: the future of the current population.”

Variation II “You acknowledge that the land once belonged to A. But you think the crucial criteria is that your people invested into the land, that they have their livelihood there and transformed it into a valuable asset.”

Example: “You must be crazy to assume that I will ever accept an outcome in which you can go on exploiting my region.”

Reframed: “You would like to explore options which will allow that your region to receive a fair share of the revenues in the country.”

Example: “The perspectives and views of all persons must influence the decisions taken in an equal and fair manner and no voice should be ignored in the process.”

Summarised: “You believe it is important to consider all opinions present for the decision.”

* Thanks for the paraphrasing examples to Ljubljana Wüsthube.

Facilitation Tools	
Description	Examples
<p>Systemic and circular questioning</p> <p>One of the main tasks of a facilitator is to ask questions. Answering questions creates information which helps to build good communication in a group.</p> <p>Open questions are helpful and encourage participants to expand their knowledge and understanding.</p> <p>Closed questions are less helpful since the response is limited to Yes or No.</p> <p>Systemic questions are those which try to emphasise the inter-connectedness of events, e.g. revenge and counter-revenge in a violent conflict.</p> <p>Circular questions focus on relationships by encouraging the parties to look at each other's perspectives or those of outside parties. Their advantage is that they enable parties to change perspectives.</p>	<p>Example: "What is your position on this issue?"</p> <p>Example: "Do you agree with this statement?"</p> <p>Example: "How do you think these events of violence are connected with each other?"</p> <p>Example: "Why do you think has party X taken this position? How do you think the International Community assesses your positions?"</p>

3.3 Visualisation

During the last 40 years facilitators have made increasing use of visualisation techniques. It is recommended to make use of the full spectrum of visualisation tools – to the extent that the local culture supports this approach. Classic forms of visualisation include the use of flip charts or pinboards and cards to present information or to collect, order and re-order points and ideas. Another form is the use of photos or drawings in dialogues and asking the participants to share their perspective on these visuals.

The facilitator can use visualisation both to influence and shape the process as well as to document results. When using it to document, it is important to take into account the cultural and individual needs of the participants for anonymity and confidentiality.

Visualisation Example: Process architecture

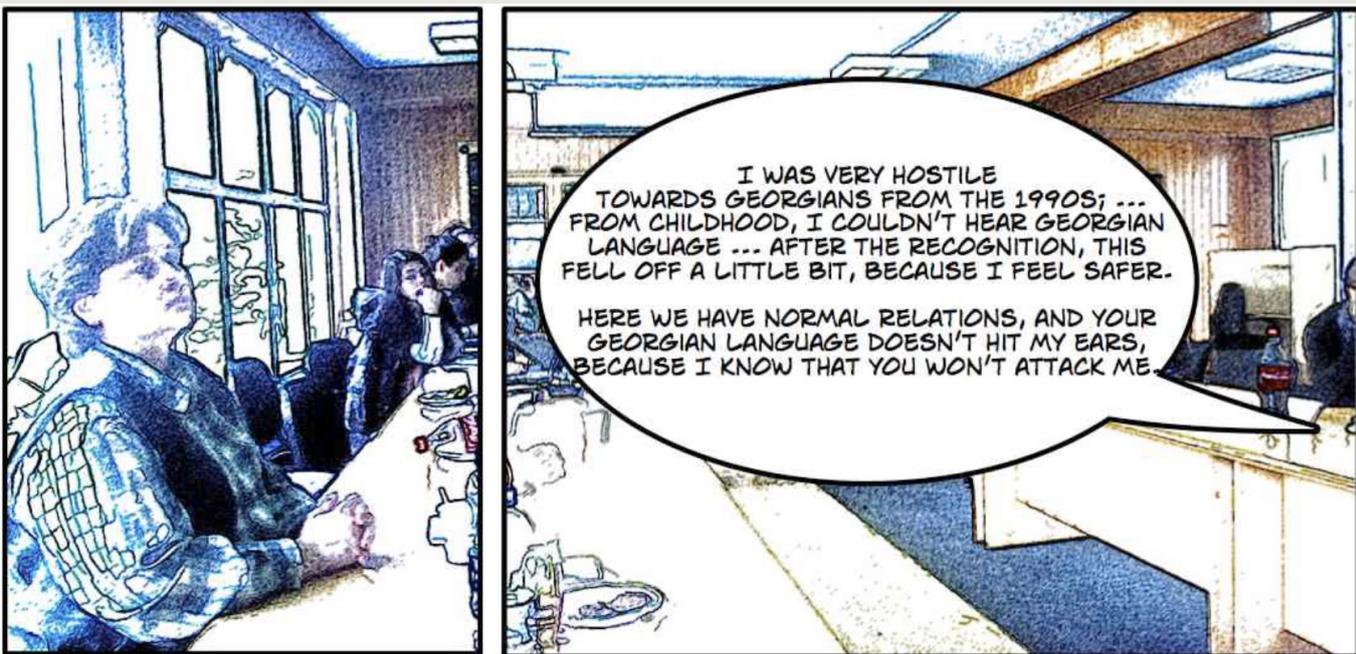
(Antioquia 2015)



Visualising Discussion and Process Architecture

- ≡ “Interactive visualising” (i.e. writing and grouping) process elements and dialogue elements is a powerful tool for documenting options or agreements and visibly keeping track of jointly elaborated or individual opinions without “losing” them in a dialogue.
- ≡ In conflict transformation – as in other change processes – what we do is equally important as *how* we do it. Visualisation in moderation is more than just jotting down words on a flipchart or using power-point for an input – it is about starting from the needs of those present and fostering a joint change process. This allows conscious communication towards shared meaning within a group aiming at understanding and solving problems
- ≡ The “one idea – one card” principle of visualising brings all voices, independently of conflict side or hierarchy, to the forefront and keeps them visible and discussable. Having all points visible for all allows for easier discussion; ideas can be shifted and clustered. Moreover, the writing down separates the idea from the person who had brought it forward. New perspectives and new clusters become visible as the creativity of those discussing is unleashed.
- ≡ Clarity is key – of the guiding question asked, of the goal to be reached – for visual facilitation to work. Like all tools, visualisation can be used either way – to manipulate or to be transparent. Only if the facilitator(s) honestly broker the ideas and cards is the tool and the process trustworthy for participants.
- ≡ When looking at the potential for change and learning, visualisation allows for cognitive and emotional channels to be triggered, and brings the visual types among participants (80%) closer to the process than spoken/verbalised processes only.

Barbara Unger, Programme Director Latin America, Berghof Foundation.



Visualisation Example: Coloured Pencil Report *The Sixth Day*

(Caucasus 2010/2011)

Coloured Pencil Report – A Tool for Dialogue Processes

A facilitated process that produces something that is “new” to the participants is often perceived as a “dream” and something that is not quite “real”. The new perceptions of participants do not fully match conventional or previous perceptions. In systemic therapy, the process of people accepting new information is called “perturbation”. A successfully conducted one week-workshop is enough to “perturb” and to irritate all participants in a positive way. Yet, in escalated situations, this experience remains like a day-dream and it might be a challenge for participants to explain this dream to those back home who did not participate. One can consider this state of mind as the maximum shift possible within the framework of a one-off event. More can only be achieved by repetition and continuous follow-up work.

The Coloured Pencil Report (CPR) is a tool that addresses this state of mind. Its overall goal is to capture main results and dynamics of the process:

- ≡ The report addresses primarily participants of the workshop. Although guest speakers can be introduced, for example during a study visit, the focus lies on the group of participants, on the group’s dynamics and its perspectives of the overall project process. Additional information, e.g. “who are the politicians you met?” can only be provided by the participant in case they distribute the CPR.
- ≡ The coloured pencil style detaches the photographic image from reality. By using photos as the basis of the CPR the scenes displayed cannot be called fiction and relate to documented “reality”. At the same time, its appearance is detached from this reality, lending among other things some confidentiality.
- ≡ The report takes a third party (facilitator’s) perspective. This facilitator comments on the events and paraphrases them. In this respect, the report is a prolongation of the facilitated process which the participants just experienced.
- ≡ The report does not quote people and does not put words into their mouth – with the exception of the facilitator. By doing so it respects the rule that everybody should speak for himself and herself. In *The Sixth Day* (CPR No. 4), speakers are not seen and speech bubbles are not pointing to specific persons.
- ≡ It does not mention any names and respects privacy; it also respects copyright regulations.

Dr. Oliver Wolleh, Programme Director Caucasus, Berghof Foundation.

Further reading

Oliver Wolleh (2011). *The Sixth Day*. Coloured Pencil Report No. 4. Berlin: Berghof Foundation. http://www.berghof-foundation.org/fileadmin/redaktion/Publications/Other_Resources/SC_Coloured_Pencil_Report_No4.pdf.

3.4 Dialogue Planning Checklist

This checklist can be useful for the preparation of a dialogue session, as a sheet for observers during the dialogue, or for the debriefing of the facilitator team after a dialogue session. In order to fulfil its potential, dialogues should always be thought of and planned as more than one-off events, however.

Preparing the dialogue

Facilitation team

- ≡ Is our facilitation team well balanced, multi-partial, do we have insiders/outsideers?
- ≡ Do the team members know and trust each other?
- ≡ Are we aware of each facilitator's strengths and weaknesses?
- ≡ Is our team well prepared for the conflict(s), we are dealing with?

Dialogue's framework conditions

- ≡ *Purpose*: Is the dialogue's goal and the intended outcome clear to all?
- ≡ *Target group*: Are all relevant stakeholders involved in the dialogue?
- ≡ *Group size*: Did we define the number of participants to be invited?
- ≡ *Setting*: Is there a suitable space, where the dialogue can take place? Is it preferable to hold the dialogue in a neutral location outside the country/region as opposed to in the country/region?
- ≡ *Language*: If a dialogue is held between groups requiring (consecutive or simultaneous) translation, are we making sure to integrate the translators into the facilitation team (and to allow for additional time in holding the dialogue)? In case the dialogue is held in a shared language which is however mastered to different degrees, are we making sure that participants feel free and encouraged to clarify issues? Is one member of the facilitation team prepared to act as liaison person with the translators and technicians?
- ≡ *Matters of protocol*: Are we attuned to the specific religious and cultural requirements of the different participants and well prepared to accommodate these? (For example, in Christian settings it may be expected that the facilitator invite a priest to say opening or closing prayers; practicing Muslims may request that female participants are accompanied by a male family member who should be seated discreetly in the background; also, there may be need to prayer rooms and prayer times need to be factored into the schedule; Buddhist monks must eat before noon, so that the organisers must make sure to provide some food in the dialogue venues; etc.)
- ≡ *Timing*: Do we know when it is possible to schedule dialogue sessions with the target group? Are we prepared to accompany the dialogue over time and through multiple sessions?

Logistical arrangements

- ≡ *Appropriate dialogue space*: Are all participants able to establish eye contact and listen to each other easily? Is the seating arranged in a non-hierarchical way (with potential exceptions where culturally or personally necessary)?
- ≡ *Room for smaller groups*: Are there smaller rooms/spaces for breakout groups?
- ≡ *Refreshments*: Is there an arrangement for refreshments?
- ≡ *Invitation*: Are all participants invited timely?
- ≡ *Confirmation*: Do we have a list of confirmed participants?

Agenda setting

- ≡ Is there sufficient time for discussion and for breaks, which are an important part of the dialogue process? Do we have some flexibility and time buffers in the agenda?
- ≡ Does the agenda reflect a clear process design with trust-building measures at the beginning before discussing potentially contentious issues?

Facilitating the Dialogue

Ground rules

- ≡ Do we have a clear procedure for developing and agreeing on ground rules for the dialogue?
- ≡ Do all participants agree on the set of ground rules?
- ≡ Are the agreed rules disseminated or displayed for all in a written form?
- ≡ Do we refer to them whenever necessary during the dialogue process?

Dialogue phases

Phase 1

- ≡ Do we give all parties the opportunity to share their perspective on the issues?
- ≡ Do we write down interests and needs, instead of positions?
- ≡ Do we regularly summarise statements, thereby acknowledging the parties without offending other parties?

Phase 2

- ≡ Do we encourage the sharing of perspectives?
- ≡ Do we use tools that acknowledge the underlying feelings, concerns, fears and needs of all parties and encourage mutual understanding (e.g. open ended and circular questions, reframing, mirroring)?

Phase 3

- ≡ Do we generate inclusive options?
- ≡ Do we use brainstorming tools and encourage a broad spectrum of creative alternatives; without immediately evaluating the options?

Phase 4

- ≡ Do we carefully evaluate all options?
- ≡ Do we have criteria most suitable with respect to a reasonable consensus?

Consensus building

- ≡ Do the participants agree on the type of consensus they would like to achieve?
- ≡ Is the consensus achieved written down and disseminated or displayed for all?

Managing Difficult Situations

- ≡ Are we prepared to engage with escalating disputes and threats of hostilities or even violence?
- ≡ Are we prepared to engage with expression of strong feelings (crying, leaving the room, etc.)

Self-care & care for facilitation team members

- ≡ Are we taking care of ourselves and of the members of your facilitation team?
- ≡ Do we recognise our own limits?
- ≡ Are we taking breaks seriously?
- ≡ Do we work together to handle difficult situations?
- ≡ Do we value our achievements and the contributions of every team member?

Continuing the dialogue

Debriefing & Preparing next steps

- ≡ Have we planned enough time for debriefing?
- ≡ What worked well, what will we do differently next time around?
- ≡ Which steps need to be taken by whom until the next dialogue meeting/session?

4 Literature & Useful Resources

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Berghof Foundation

The Berghof Foundation is an independent, non-governmental and non-profit organisation dedicated to supporting conflict stakeholders and actors in their efforts to achieve sustainable peace through peacebuilding and conflict transformation.

Our Vision

The Berghof Foundation's vision is a world in which people maintain peaceful relations and overcome the use of violence as a means of political and social force.

While we consider conflict to be an integral, often necessary and therefore unavoidable part of political and social life, we believe that the use of force in conflict is not inevitable.

Conflict transformation requires engagement of the conflicting parties and those who are most affected by the violence. But it also requires the knowledge, skills, resources and institutions that may help to eventually turn violent conflicts into constructive and sustained collaboration.

Our vision builds on the conviction that drivers of peaceful change will only prosper if appropriate spaces for conflict transformation exist in which they can do so.

Our Mission

The Berghof Foundation contributes to a world without violence by supporting conflict stakeholders and actors in their efforts to achieve sustainable peace through peacebuilding and conflict transformation.

In so doing, we rely on the knowledge, skills and resources available in the areas of conflict research, peace support, peace education and grantmaking, which we strive to develop further. Based on the principles of our approach, we work jointly with partners and donors to facilitate the creation of inclusive support mechanisms, processes and structures that we hope will enable stakeholders and actors in conflicts to engage with each other constructively and develop non-violent responses to their conflict related challenges.

»Creating Space for Conflict Transformation«

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Published by

Berghof Foundation Operations GmbH

© Berghof Foundation Operations GmbH

Altensteinstrasse 48a

14195 Berlin

Germany

www.berghof-foundation.org

September 2017

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Imprint

Norbert Ropers: *Basics of Dialogue Facilitation*. Edited by Beatrix Austin, Anna Köhler & Anne Kruck.
Berlin / Tübingen: Berghof Foundation 2017.

Special thanks for their practice contributions to this edition go to the programme teams at Berghof Foundation, and individually to Sonja Neuweiler, Norbert Ropers, Barbara Unger and Oliver Wolleh.

Photos:

Cover, Patcharee Angkoontassaneeyarat, Facilitation Workshop, Nontaburi Province/Thailand, 2017

p. 4, Berghof Foundation Operations GmbH, Jordan, 2012

p. 4, REUTERS/Mohamed Azakir, National Dialogue Session, Beirut, Lebanon, 2015

p. 6, Maciej Dakowicz, A chai tea, Al Mukhalla, Yemen, 2007

p. 13, Anne Kruck, Civic and Nonviolent Education in Jordan, Amman 2014

p. 19, Deep South Photojournalism Network (DSP), Peace Media Day, Pattani, 2015

p. 23, Barbara Unger, Example for a Process Architecture, Antioquia/Medellín, 2015

p. 24, Oliver Wolleh, Excerpt from Coloured Pencil Report No. 4, Caucasus, 2010/2011

Graphs:

p. 14, Figure 1, The flow of divergence and consensus building: Norbert Ropers/Anna Köhler, inspired by Marianne M Bojer

p. 16, Figure 2, Applying methods for consensus building: Norbert Ropers

p. 20, Figure 3, Fish bowl: Tarmo Toikkanen for the Public Domain