

Lesson 20

Learning Exercises

Anchor

10 minutes

Anchor the content in this lesson with an open question. Participants can share in groups of two or three people their response to this question:

- What is one experience where you have been able to defuse someone who is angry or hostile?
- What techniques did you find effective in defusing anger?

Add

20 minutes

Present the PowerPoint slides or ask participants to discuss the lesson readings in a small group.

Apply

25 minutes

The goal of this exercise is to practice using communication and conflict skills to defuse an angry person or group. In each of the scenario groups, a town meeting is occurring in the village closest to the IDP camp where civilians were killed in the raid. At the town meeting, one person in the community becomes angry and begins yelling and threatening the others in the room. Ask for a volunteer or group of volunteers from any of the stakeholder teams to role-play being angry and escalating tension at this meeting. Set up the training room as if there is a town meeting. One of the stakeholder groups representing the government (civilian, military or police) should open the meeting and begin to discuss the recent raid in the IDP camp. The angry role players should then disrupt and escalate tensions in the meeting. Any of the other stakeholder teams or players can then attempt to diffuse the situation using verbal and nonverbal communication skills to defuse conflict. Let this scenario play out, with the role-players from different stakeholder teams attempting to practice skills. The angry role-players should attempt to be as realistic as possible.

After twenty minutes of role-playing, debrief the scenario.

- What did each stakeholder team do verbally or nonverbally that either escalated or deescalated the situation?
- Did any of the role-players illustrate “active listening” or “paraphrasing” or “diplomatic speaking”? Give specific examples.
- What worked best? What did not work?
- Debrief the role-players who were angry and escalating the tension. Did you feel heard and understood by other stakeholders? What made you feel like escalating or deescalating the anger you felt?

See the “Scenario-based Learning” section in the [Handbook on Human Security: A Civil-Military-Police Curriculum](#) for explanation of the scenarios and teams.

Away

5 minutes

To end the lesson, the trainer can ask participants to divide into groups of 2 or 3 people. Participants can share with each other their reflections on this lesson.

This Lesson is part of the *Handbook on Human Security* found at www.humansecuritycoordination.org

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Lesson 21

Dialogue & Facilitation Skills

Learning Objectives

At the end of the lesson, participants will be able to:

- Distinguish between the characteristics of dialogue and debate
- Identify five characteristics of a good facilitator
- Identify the relevance of dialogue and facilitation skills for leadership in complex environments to achieve human security

Multi-stakeholder dialogue is a fundamental part of multi-stakeholder coordination. Dialogue is a process that creates a safe space for people with diverse experiences and points of view. Civilians, military and police need to dialogue with each other on all aspects of the Coordination Wheel for Human Security. This includes dialogue on conflict assessment, dialogue on joint planning, dialogue on separate or joint programming such as civilian assistance and protection of civilians, and dialogue to monitor and evaluate the security sector.

This lesson draws from the *Little Book of Dialogue on Difficult Subjects*.¹⁰⁹

1. Dialogue

Dialogue is a way of talking that encourages active listening and honest but respectful speaking. The goal of dialogue is to improve understanding and relationships between people or groups that are in conflict. Dialogue is less formal and structured than mediation. Unlike negotiation or mediation, dialogue is not

aimed at reaching an immediate solution to a problem. Instead, dialogue is used when there are misunderstandings between groups and different experiences. *Dialogue simply creates the space to talk about problems in a place where everyone is committed to listening to each other and trying to understand different points of view.*

Dialogue differs from another commonly used communication approach called debate. In a debate, participants either consciously or unconsciously believe that there is only one right way to believe or act. When people believe they alone hold the whole truth, there is no need to listen to others. For this reason, some people following the debate approach discredit dialogue because it requires them to recognise that they may be able to learn from people who believe differently. Dialogue requires participants to keep their minds open to the process of learning and changing.

2. Comparing Dialogue with Debate

The chart below describes some of the differences between “dialogue” and “debate.” Politicians and the news media often dramatise debates where each side of an argument tries to prove they are right and the other side is wrong. Debate is unlikely to lead to real understanding or an appreciation of the differences that led to a given conflict. Dialogue is more likely to lead to mutual understanding.

Figure 56: Comparison of Debate and Dialogue

DEBATE	DIALOGUE
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.
People listen to the other to find flaws in their arguments.	People listen to the other to understand how their experiences shape their beliefs.
People critique the experiences of others as distorted and invalid.	People accept the experiences of others as real and valid.
People appear to be determined not to change their own views on the issue.	People appear to be somewhat open to changing their understanding of the issue.
People speak based on assumptions made about the others’ positions and motivations.	People speak only about their own understanding and experience.
People oppose each other and attempt to prove each other wrong.	People work together toward common understanding.
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.

3. The Role of Dialogue in Complex Environments

In complex environments, diverse stakeholders need to understand each other’s experiences and opinions. A formal and facilitated dialogue can enable civil society, governments, military, police and international actors to improve their understanding of the context and their relationships with each other. For example, in a complex environment, diverse groups may use formal dialogue on the following topics:

Security dialogues to identify the threats facing different groups in society, especially those groups that may be marginalised or lack political representation, such as women and minority groups

Assessment dialogues to discuss the root causes of insecurity and violent conflict and to identify local resources for peace and human security

Dialogue skills are also useful in informal or unplanned occasions such as checkpoint or border crossings, ad hoc meetings, or even sharing tea or drinks at a local restaurant.

4. Ground Rules or Guidelines

Ground rules – sometimes also called dialogue guidelines – are a set of behavioural standards and goals that people in a formal dialogue agree to follow to create the best possible experience. Ground rules are important for several reasons.

First, setting ground rules serves to normalise a new process and strengthen ownership. In dialogue, the group designs and agrees to its own set of norms and guidelines. Setting guidelines together helps participants consciously choose to be in the process and decide what behaviours to honour and protect.

Secondly, setting guidelines together communicates that everyone in the group is essentially equal, at least with respect to the group's task. This is also somewhat rare because most settings where people interact involve some degree of hierarchy where someone is in an authoritative role over others. If the dialogue is based upon a collaborative search for truth among participants, it is vital that all of those involved have equal opportunity to participate fully in the process and no one is seen as the authority.

Generally, there are two ways to set ground rules. In a setting with time constraints, one approach is to list the ground rules and ask if people can comply with them. It is important that each person has a chance to modify or raise concerns about the rules. Beware of prematurely assuming that people have agreed to a set of ground rules when they have not. After ample opportunity to change the proposed ground rules, the facilitator can invite public agreement that the group is willing to hold themselves and others accountable to the ground rules.

Sample of Basic Ground Rules

1. *Listen to understand the other's point of view* rather than to prepare a defense of your own view. Try to listen more than you speak.

2. *Respect others, and refuse to engage in name-calling.*

3. *Speak about personal experiences.* Start your sentences with "I" rather than "you." "I experienced...."

4. *Minimise Interruptions and Distractions.* In general people should be allowed to finish what they are saying without being interrupted directly or with side-talk between other participants. Also people should silence their cell phones.

5. *Maintain confidentiality.* Outside the group, discuss the content of what was said, not who said what.

6. *Ask questions.* Ask honest, thought-provoking questions that give people the opportunity to explore and explain their underlying assumptions.

7. *Stay through the hard times.* Make a commitment to stay in the dialogue despite the tensions.

8. *Aim to understand.* The goal of dialogue is to increase understanding between individuals. The goal is not to solve the problem or agree on everything.

9. *Recognise common ground.* Every two people share something in common. Find it!

10. *"Ouch," then educate.* If someone says something hurtful, don't just disengage. Let the individual and the group know why it was hurtful.

Another approach is to elicit the ground rules from the group. This approach offers much better buy-in and adherence as people have invested more thought and energy in developing them. But the process can be very time consuming. In sustained dialogue processes, some facilitators use the process of eliciting ground rules as a way to learn the concerns, fears, and other tendencies in the group.

In some dialogues, participants may request that others "speak from the heart" meaning that they share their emotions or the impact that an experience has had on their life. In some cultures, people participate in dialogue without observable emotion and may even look down upon others or walk out of a dialogue that includes too many emotional expressions. Facilitators will need to "read the room" or try to get a sense of how to make a dialogue safe for some people to express their emotions without making the room so emotional that it feels unsafe, awkward or uncomfortable for other participants.

One strategy to align the group around ground rules is to ask a question like this: "Before we go any further, can we all agree to try to stay respectful and give everybody a chance to speak?" People will rarely say no, and this question gives you and others the capacity to point out when people are being disrespectful and are interrupting. Potentially the group agreement on this question can empower the facilitator to point out when some people are dominating the conversation.

5. The Role of a Dialogue Facilitator

Dialogue between groups can be done with or without a facilitator. A facilitator guides people through a dialogue process. Facilitators are “process experts” rather than experts on a subject area. They keep a dialogue focused, help participants consider a variety of views, and summarise group discussions. They model active listening and respectful speaking.

Facilitators help the group explore similarities and differences of opinion. Facilitators do not promote or share their own opinions. Facilitators make sure that all participants get a chance to contribute to the dialogue. Facilitators bear primary responsibility for enforcing the ground rules, although the group also shares this collective responsibility.

Effective dialogue between people of diverse experiences and beliefs usually requires the guidance of a facilitator. The role of the facilitator in guiding the conversation makes dialogue different than other communication forms. Facilitators help create a safe space by setting ground rules or guidelines to keep dialogue participants focused on listening to and working with each other. Facilitators guide the dialogue process without deciding who is right or wrong, or declaring a “winner” as a moderator does in a debate.

6. Facilitation Skills and Tasks

Facilitation is a learned skill. “Natural leaders” or people who play important leadership roles in other activities may make excellent candidates for serving as facilitators, but not always. Facilitators are similar, but also distinct from other types of effective leaders. The role of the facilitator may be the most important element of a dialogue. Key competency skills of effective facilitators include the following:

Establish the purpose of the dialogue. Everyone in the room should clearly understand the purpose and focus of the dialogue. Put this in writing and say it verbally. Check that participants understand and ask if they have any questions.

Foster dialogue. Remind participants of the difference between dialogue and debate. Help them grasp the importance of active listening and speaking respectfully and honestly, and how this differs from ways they may be used to talking with others.

Manage the agenda and guide the process. Be as self-confident as possible to assure the participants you know how to guide the process. Keep the discussion focused, and keep your focus on the process. Ask open-ended questions that explore the complexities of the issues.

Develop ground rules. Either explain or ask the group to develop a list of ground rules. Ask participants if they can agree to them, and invite them to monitor how they are following the ground rules. When the ground rules are violated, give gentle but firm reminders.

Listen actively. Demonstrate verbal and nonverbal listening skills that show people you understand what they are saying.

Monitor group dynamics. Pay attention to ensure that everyone has a chance to speak and that no one is dominating the conversation. Check in with participants who seem quiet or withdrawn. Ask how they are feeling. Remind participants to “share air time” so that everyone feels responsible for monitoring the group’s dynamics.

Communicate interest in everyone’s perspective. Help to bring out views that aren’t represented. Participants in a dialogue should feel that the facilitator is authentically interested in understanding their experiences and ideas.

Help deal with difficult participants. Keep one-on-one arguments from taking over. Prepare for participants who talk too much, refuse to participate, or disrupt the workshop. Respond to the situation with confidence and grace.

Summarise and paraphrase. Help people feel that their unique experiences and ideas are heard and understood by summarising and/or paraphrasing what is said. This skill can also help with long-winded participants who have lost their own key message.

Stay impartial. In order to maintain everyone's trust, facilitators must refrain from sharing their experiences or beliefs relevant to the issue. The facilitator's role is to help participants wrestle with the similarities and differences in the views they expressed.

Model the behaviour you expect from participants. Facilitators should model active listening, respectful and honest speaking, and other ground rules at all times through their words and body language.

Close with a summary. Summarise the discussion and help focus the group on talking concretely about next steps they want to take individually and collectively.

7. Advanced Skills and Tasks

Some facilitator characteristics – whether learned or natural – are important in leading highly effective dialogues.

Facilitators inspire confidence in their leadership

Dialogue requires a facilitator to lead the dialogue and decide where to guide the conversation next. For much if not most of the time, participants will be so engrossed in the exchanges that they will lose track of the larger flow of the dialogue process. But sometimes, the group's attention is drawn to the process itself, and it is important that the facilitator not appear incapable of making a decision regarding the substance of the dialogue. The group must feel that it can trust the facilitator's judgment about which topics to deepen and which to neglect, and that the facilitator trusts his or her own judgment.

Having enough natural charisma to inspire confidence in others is useful in the facilitator's role as the leader and will help create an atmosphere in which people feel safe and able to engage productively.

Facilitators are good multi-taskers

Facilitators need to keep track of many different and competing objectives at once. For example, articulate but long-winded speakers often bring important content to a discussion. But in order for a group to benefit from their contributions, a facilitator must keep track of the relative values of what they are saying, people's level of apparent boredom/interest in the ideas, how many people have yet to address the topic, and how much time is left in the session.

Facilitators are flexible and not overly controlling

Since the facilitator's job is to create a setting in which many people feel empowered to listen, talk, and learn, the facilitator must be careful not to overly control the dialogue, because this will make people feel boxed in and not truly included. Facilitators provide guidance but also listen to the group and observe participant's level of energy when deciding whether to be flexible or when to keep on schedule.

Facilitators see a situation from many points of view

Many facilitators engage in dialogue as part of their commitment to broader principles like justice, peace, and democracy. In some cases, competent facilitators have an unconscious (or even conscious) bias against participants that hold more political, economic, or social power. Facilitators need to do a great deal of self-reflection to process their own biases before facilitating a dialogue in which their biases might affect their ability to manage the process. Facilitators must be able to empathise with the experiences of all the participants. The capacity to understand all points of view is essential.

Facilitators stay calm and engaged

One test of a facilitator's skill level is his or her reaction to emotional intensity within a group. This may take the form of anger, tears, rudeness, expressed frustration, or other intense emotion. In these conditions, a facilitator's primary task is to maintain the group's focus of attention in spite of the charged emotions. This can be very difficult, especially if the emotions are directed at the facilitator. Staying calm in the midst of anxiety or tension takes a great deal of practice and inner strength. A wise facilitator stays emotionally present and engaged while thinking about what is best for the group rather than formulating a defence or attempting to stop emotional expression.

Facilitators pose provocative questions

When designing dialogues, facilitators come up with guiding questions, not with minute-by-minute agendas in order to leave space for participants to contribute their own inputs and develop a common understanding. A highly skilled facilitator is able to diverge from his guiding questions and come up spontaneously with new questions that will move the dialogue forward and attain a deeper level of

honest analysis. The ability to improvise and generate questions that help the group see commonalities or disagreements is an important skill.

Facilitators connect with people

A final important quality that separates first-rate facilitators from those with only a basic level of competence concerns the ability to emotionally connect with participants and continually invite them to stay engaged in the process. Highly skilled facilitators convey that they understand how participants see the issue, and that everyone in the group can learn more from each other by staying with the process. The challenge is to stay engaged in the process as participants learn and transform at their own rate without seeming to be smarter or more evolved than the participants. The facilitator reminds participants that they all are on a path toward a higher understanding, and that the facilitator is only a half-step ahead.

8. Differences between Facilitators and Other Leaders

Most natural leaders and facilitators share some of these important skills, but not all effective leaders make good facilitators. Some leadership roles and skills undermine the capacity to be good facilitators.

Teachers and trainers may be tempted to see their role as fostering growth and development by dispensing wisdom to the group. By contrast, effective facilitators recognise that the group must come to its own conclusions based on participant's exchanges.

Good meeting leaders stick to a defined agenda. However, effective facilitators sometimes keep their focus on the overall goal of learning rather than accomplishing an agenda. Good public speakers may be tempted to use their rhetorical skills to sway disparate people to their points of view. But rather than convincing participants to accept one point of view, good facilitators help people understand several points of view. They spend more time listening than talking.

REVIEW

This lesson provides an understanding of how dialogue and facilitation skills can enable civil society, military and police to enhance their ability to understand complex environments through listening and learning from other stakeholders and to improve their ability to coordinate with other stakeholders working toward the shared goal of human security. This lesson contrasted dialogue and debate to illustrate how debate-style conversations aim to convince others their opinions and experiences are wrong while dialogue-style conversations aim to help people understand why other people's experiences have led them to hold different opinions. The lesson asserts that dialogue can be difficult, but that it has the reward of greater understanding and improving relationships between people. The use of dialogue guidelines and a skilled facilitator can make it easier for people to engage in dialogue. The lesson reviews the key skills and characteristics of a professional facilitator.

Citations

¹⁰⁹ David Campt and Lisa Schirch, *The Little Book of Dialogue on Difficult Subjects*. Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 2004.

Lesson 21

Learning Exercises

Anchor

10 minutes

To begin the lesson, anchor the content in this lesson with an open question:

- What is an example of one experience where you had to facilitate a meeting in a diverse group of people? What was effective in trying to facilitate this meeting? What was challenging?

Add

20 minutes

Present the PowerPoint slides or ask participants to discuss the lesson readings in a small group.

Apply

25 minutes

The goal of this exercise is to practice using dialogue and facilitation skills. Continuing from the disruption in the exercise in Lesson 22, the town meeting to discuss what to do about the eighteen civilians killed in the IDP camp continues but in small groups instead of one large group. Create small groups of 5-6 people, one person from each stakeholder in the scenario you are using.

One person in each small group should take on the role of facilitator to practice the skills in this lesson. The other participants can model either dialogue or debate. Some of the participants in each of the groups should role-play an angry person who is escalating tension in the meeting. Allow the dialogues to continue for twenty minutes. Then debrief the scenario with a discussion in each small group:

- What did the facilitator do well verbally or nonverbally? What communication skills were evident?
- How did the facilitator handle difficult or tense moments in the dialogue?
- Does each participant in the group feel like others understood their point of view?

See the “Scenario-based Learning” section in the [Handbook on Human Security: A Civil-Military-Police Curriculum](#) for explanation of the scenarios and teams.

Away

5 minutes

To end the lesson, the trainer can ask participants to divide into groups of 2 or 3 people. Participants can share with each other their reflections on this lesson.

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