

6 Herding cats

Facilitation in social learning processes

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Introduction

The Adaptive Collaborative Management (ACM) of Forest Landscapes programme was a fascinating experience in participatory action research and social learning. At the start of the programme, some of the concepts were not well defined, in terms of what exactly they meant in practice and how to operationalise them. Due to the main author's previous experience in action research and social change, he was asked to support the ACM team through facilitated meetings and workshops in order to move the conceptual thinking and practice forward and accompany the team in their learning process.

His first involvement was as a learning facilitator in a foundation workshop in early 2000, where concepts were clarified and first steps in implementation were set up. Later, he became an advisor and attended several meetings of the advisory group, interacted with the team and many individuals who were engaged in ACM; and at a later stage in 2005, he reviewed some of the ACM activities in Indonesia, Zimbabwe, Cameroon and Nepal. It was a fascinating journey the team had taken and he deeply appreciates having been involved.

The experiences on which this chapter on facilitation is grounded go way beyond the ACM programme. Many lessons and insights described here are based on long-term processes in community development and participatory learning and extension which we as PICOTEAM (Institute for People, Innovation and Change in Organisations) have gained since 1991 in Zimbabwe, South Africa, Tanzania, Cambodia and the Dominican Republic. Our team was developing the implementation capacity of government officers, NGO staff and community change agents to facilitate social learning processes, whom we accompanied for several years. This gave us the opportunity to deeply understand these processes, experiment with them and develop approaches and methodologies to facilitate processes and develop the necessary capacities. Together, we have facilitated more than a thousand events and processes at different levels – public and private organisations, multi-stakeholder processes, high-level consultations, as well as communities (www.picoteam.org). These varying levels often require similar principles but with a different architecture. This chapter mainly focuses on the community level. It is an experience-based analysis with myriads of insights and

conceptualisation from our team in different contexts. The chapter looks at facilitation in a comprehensive way from a practice perspective. For more information, see our website: www.picoteam.org.

As mentioned repeatedly in this book, facilitation is critical for the success of ACM. This chapter first looks at the concept of facilitation for change (F4C) as we understand it now, then it describes some pertinent issues in implementation with examples, after which we elaborate how to develop such complex competences among field staff in an effective way. We conclude with some critical issues to consider for ACM-type interventions.

When we talk of a facilitator/process manager, in most cases, it will be a facilitation team rather than one individual.

Facilitation – an overloaded term

In the 1980s, facilitation was understood in many development organisations as workshop moderation. In the 1990s when participatory development became more mainstream, it became clear that the role of facilitation needed to be deeper and more transformative. Its value was seen as going beyond workshops and it became a key concept in the implementation of participatory methodologies (see Chambers 2002). In the late 1990s and 2000s, facilitation evolved into a word that could mean almost anything related to participation. It became an overloaded term often with little defined meaning, and an over-emphasis on tools (Groot and Maarleveld 2000). In the present era, our understanding expanded towards facilitation of processes of change and development; it became clear that effective facilitation needs to be more than applying participatory tools and methods. However, the depth and breadth of the processes, such as its architecture, its psychological nature, the deeper psycho-social issues involved and the need for organisational development, have often been only minimally developed.

In our perspective, in the context of social learning processes and participatory action learning/research like ACM, we see facilitation as a process of guiding people in their own learning about their context, social systems and ways to create the future they hope for. Facilitation is an experience-based knowledge creation from a constructivist perspective, where people construct/change their own reality, rather than in a conventional teaching mode or knowledge transfer. It is about making people better understand their systems to change/re-create them, rather than an external understanding of their system by outsiders providing outside advice. Facilitation has a strong systemic dimension as change in systems is complex, dynamic and rarely succeeds with a linear approach (see 'soft systems' methodology by Checkland 1999). Interventions in facilitation oriented towards change are designed to create discomfort with the status quo, to trigger action and through this action, experiment and find out what works, what does not work and how the system functions. It follows the logic of Kurt Lewin, one of the main founders of action research who stated already in the 1940s that:

If you want to understand the system, just try to change it!

Learning cycles are thus a fundamental architecture of such facilitation processes, and critical thinking and questioning are paramount characteristics of a facilitator. In mainstream interventions, a lot of focus was given to facilitation tools and methods (Bollinger and Zellweger 2007; Chambers 2002; Kaner 2007; Neuland 1998). These are all important, but were largely overrated. Without a solid process, these methods are likely to be disjointed and ineffective. In some contexts, facilitators acted like chairpersons and lecturers, which precluded the creation of a diverse dialogue that let people discover and experience rather than being lectured to.

The concept of facilitation for change

Building on the understanding above, this chapter will elaborate some key elements of the concept of F4C.

Purpose/goal of 'Facilitation for Change'

The fundamental question in any facilitation intervention is its purpose/goal: facilitation for what? There are three fundamentally different purposes to differentiate:

The first is the use of facilitation by outsiders to implement their interventions and ideas. Facilitation can be very powerful in convincing people of ideas, reducing resistance and smoothing processes with often pre-defined outputs. This form of facilitation can be rather manipulative and directive, an approach which many development interventions are choosing to achieve their set 'outsiders' goals in projects. As long as there is sufficient monetary incentives and intervention, this can work, but normally falls apart the moment the external intervention is over.

The second purpose is fundamentally different as it starts from peoples' values and aspirations and addresses the changes needed to self-empower and emancipate people and communities to manage better their own world and resources and to pursue their aspirations. It is an intrinsic process of self-development of communities. This 'facilitation for change' process is by its very definition built on action and social learning, and social energy to create change. This is the kind of facilitation aimed for with ACM processes as they are described in this book.

The third purpose is the moderation of conferences and events which is also called facilitation. However, this form leans more towards chairing of a meeting than F4C. It is often accompanied by already pre-designed programmes with sessions that are neither necessarily linked nor built on each other. The power lies with the moderator and not necessarily the participants.

With the recent challenges of COVID-19 and related travel restrictions, we have seen an increase of digital platforms and the need for virtual moderation. We have not practised this with rural/forest communities yet, but we see a great potential for integrating it in future.

Different levels of facilitation

Facilitation happens at different levels and the processes that happen at community level are core, as that is where people who directly manage forests live. Facilitation processes at community level are central to the success of ACM-type processes. In almost all cases – after some successes at community level, the need arises to involve other levels of groups and organisational levels as they have roles in the process. For example, a forestry administration might need to learn about such processes if ACM-type processes should become a new way of working, policy makers might need to be engaged to adapt policies and regulations, service providers might need to adapt their services, etc. There are two requirements for outsiders to co-learn: involve them in the community processes and also facilitate their own learning and adaptation in their organisations. In action learning processes towards change, community processes spiral into other processes as actors throughout the whole systems need to adapt and learn. Facilitation interventions can become quite complex systemic multiple loop learning interventions as Cronkleton, Evans and Larson (2022) experienced in a similar way. None of the essential levels with possible ‘sabotaging power’ can be left out, and risk needs to be managed. The facilitation processes for these different levels might be different but the key principles are rather similar (Hagemann et al. 1999).

Architecture of process facilitation and management

ACM-type processes as described in this book are longer-term interventions which need a clear process model with facilitation and process management, which we call ‘process architecture’. The two, facilitation and process management, are hard to separate as they will involve the same people/teams who need to see the whole and not just one workshop/event. Processes have their own dynamics which often appear successful in one step and after a next step may seem to be going backwards. It is a continuous up and down, so if one does not have a plan for the whole process, results of single events can be misleading. In the type of facilitation we encourage, single event/workshop facilitation is part of longer-term processes. These processes are not just multiple events; the activities between the workshops are equally important and part of the process design.

The fundamental change process design is based on action learning which occurs in phases and loops (described in this book in other chapters, see also Mukasa et al. 2022). The cycles normally follow five to six main phases:

- 1 **Initiating change:** developing trust and analysis of the situation towards a better self-understanding by the community and its goals, and ownership of their problems, challenges and opportunities.
- 2 **Searching for solutions/new ways:** exploring local and outsider solutions, learning about alternative ways.
- 3 **Planning and organising implementation:** planning how to move into action, strengthening local organisational capacity/overcoming weak organisation.
- 4 **Experimenting with new ideas/implementation of action:** enhancing creativity and learning by trying out new ideas.

- 5 **Reviewing outcomes and sharing ideas:** assessing new ideas and sharing with other community members.
- 6 **Reflection on lessons and replanning:** taking stock of the whole process, getting deeper in the analysis of issues, identifying new issues to deal with and adapting the whole intervention (Figure 6.1).

The role of the process facilitator/manager is to design and guide participants through such learning loops. It requires a meta-level analysis of what is happening and continuously analysing and adapting the next steps. Not a blueprint, each step is a logical consequence of the analysis of what happened in previous steps. Sometimes, steps might not be necessary; other times, they need to be intensified and a step back is needed to drill down deep enough. The main elements in such processes are as follows:

- Participatory/interactive meetings and workshops
- Coaching local teams
- Analytical work (e.g., institutional analysis in communities where an outsider role is advantageous)
- Team reflection sessions
- Conflict management processes
- Personal interaction with community members, agencies, bureaucrats, service providers, etc.

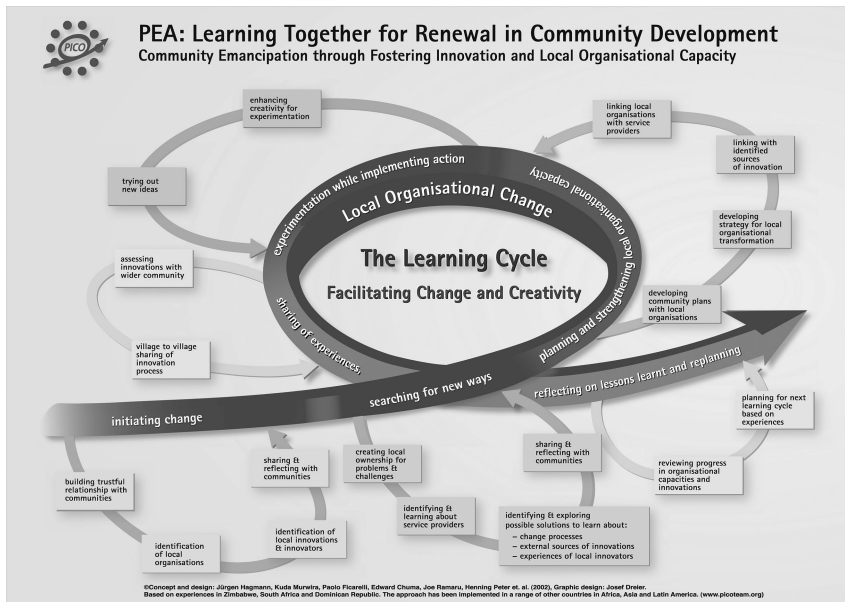


Figure 6.1 Example of a process architecture in the form of cyclical intervention loops in community development (Hagemann et al. 1998, 2002b)

In a rigorous action learning programme, there are several interlinked simultaneous loops. They serve as levels of learning if one monitors and reflects on each loop separately, bringing out the issues and next steps. Figure 6.2 shows an example from South Africa and Zimbabwe, where we had 5 overlapping loops – activities which are all in one bigger process but needed to be analysed separately.

The process facilitator/manager will facilitate the events in such processes, be a coach for local teams, a connector to outsiders and external knowledge, an advisor for critical areas, but at the same time learn from and adapt the greater process and multiple loops. This role is way more than a meeting facilitator and requires a deep understanding and vision of such processes and multiple skills. It is a challenging and high competence role which is notoriously underestimated, with the wrong people often engaged for the job – a recipe for poor outcomes of such processes. Actually, in our experience with myriads of processes across the world, this is the single most critical failure factor for action learning/social learning processes. It has often resulted in very low-quality process management and a lot of discouragement and disappointment about the value of facilitation.

Key elements of meeting/workshop facilitation processes

Workshop facilitation is one of the most crucial elements in the context of action learning processes. Therefore, we will describe it in more detail.

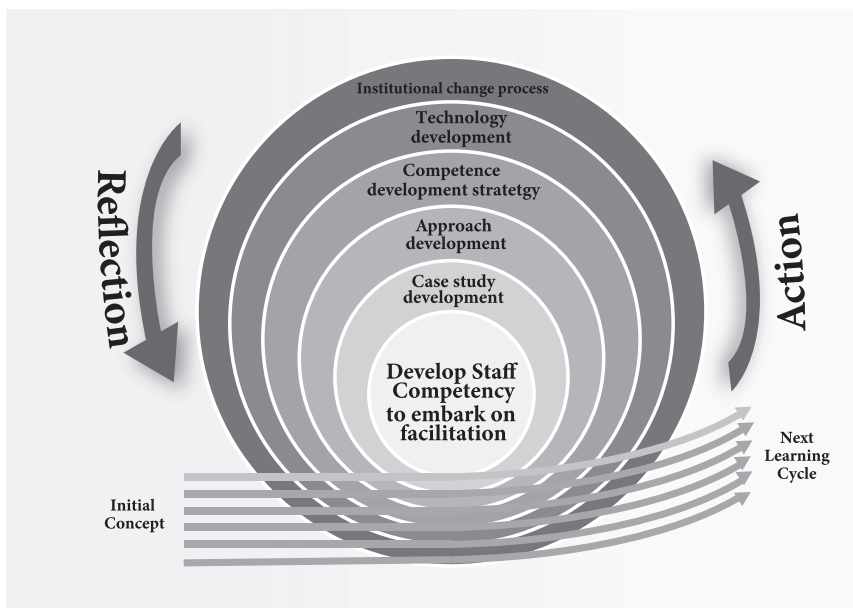


Figure 6.2 Five simultaneous levels (loops) of action and reflection towards development of participatory community development

Workshop facilitation is built around five cornerstones which are managed simultaneously to support a creative dialogue (see Figure 6.3).

The elements are:

- 1 **Guiding star, the logical flow/roadmap** for the meeting which guides the workshop process (the architecture of the meeting process) based on desired outcomes. The programme design represents a well thought through process that focuses on sequencing of items/sessions in a manner that strategically builds one step on another, rather than just agenda items as in conventional meetings.
- 2 **Facilitation techniques** which enable the understanding and clarity of the content (visualisation, consensus-based methods, participatory tools, etc.).
- 3 **Questioning for change** to trigger deep thinking and analysis, challenge the status quo and bring out creative thinking and innovation.
- 4 **Group dynamics and empathy** to understand and manage the needs of groups and bring everyone along in a socially inclusive way.

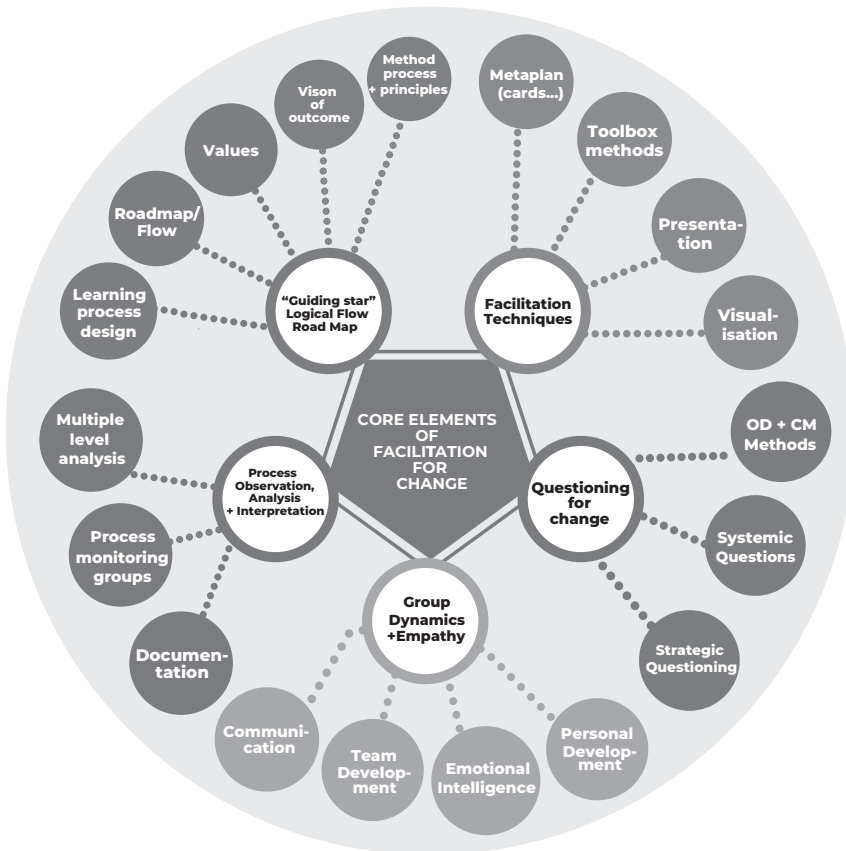


Figure 6.3 Key elements in workshop facilitation

- 5 **Process observation, analysis and interpretation** to understand what is happening; inform the next steps towards reaching the desired outcomes and unblocking deadlocks in the group. This is the navigation compass for the facilitator and comprises six levels of observation. A beginner will be fully absorbed by the content level and concentrate on this, while a highly skilled facilitator observes the dynamics of the interaction (behaviour of individuals who might dominate, the dynamics within the group, between the group and the facilitator and also the environment of the workshop). A good facilitator will be able to integrate all these levels and make the proper decisions on his/her actions, choice of methods and process steps (see Figure 6.4).

An effective workshop producing clear outputs needs to be well-planned and prepared. A facilitator alone without a solid feedback structure is likely to err, as many of the dynamics of the issues and groups are not known and are not immediately visible. A process steering group which consists of the organisers and other participants is important in defining what should come out of it before the workshop and to give feedback every evening. In community development, involving representatives of communities is critical to ensure their desired outcomes

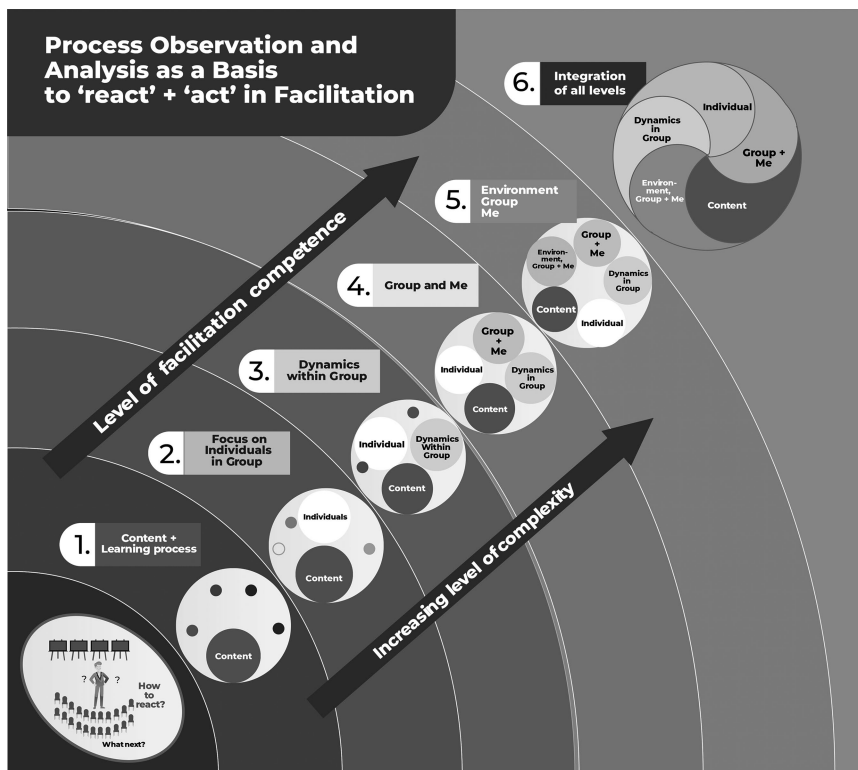


Figure 6.4 Six levels of process observation by the workshop facilitator

are built into the workshop design. Members of the process steering group become the bridge to the participants as they are co-creators and ambassadors for mobilising their constituency. Meetings of the steering group also give the facilitator the opportunity to anticipate reactions of the larger group and get prepared to react optimally to those.

The sequence of steps in a workshop is built around a rather universal logic in solution-oriented processes:

- 1 **Opening up/warm up:** familiarise people with each other, create an open and inclusive atmosphere, develop personal bonds between people, make everybody comfortable to speak, reduce hierarchies, match expectations.
- 2 **Exploring the topic:** overview, deepen analysis of issues, let people identify their own socially differentiated issues to address, validate with reality, create ownership of problems, challenge them in their way of thinking, provoke and deepen their analysis, get to the depth of things, brainstorm on the ideal situation.
- 3 **Identify ways to deal with issues in a creative way:** let them think unconventionally, consider new ways, challenge them about their usual ways.
- 4 **Converge around key issues:** bring it all together so that participants become aware of the systemic nature of problems and solutions, settle into commitments for action and next steps.
- 5 **Reflect on the process and outcomes**

Generally, the longer the exploration and analysis phase can be kept interesting, the easier it is to find common ground in the solutions (Figure 6.5). It's the deep thinking, the challenging through hard questions by the facilitator, and the open atmosphere which bring out the real issues which normally remain hidden, and which bring convergence towards solutions. The deeper you go in the analysis, the fewer solutions there are, which made us realise that:

Consensus lies in depth!

The discussion challenges the communities' perceptions and behaviour patterns (e.g., a dependency syndrome, victim culture and belief in money as the solution) and breaks down the conventional communication patterns and barriers through different and changing seating orders and non-hierarchical communication. Often, this is a revelation and a relief; and high energy and participation emerge when the real issues and the truth have been found together and spelt out for all to examine.

F4C as a process has many facets and requires a high level of skill and, most importantly, the right attitude by the facilitator.

Facilitation for change in practice

In this section, specific aspects of facilitation processes will be elaborated based on practical experience.

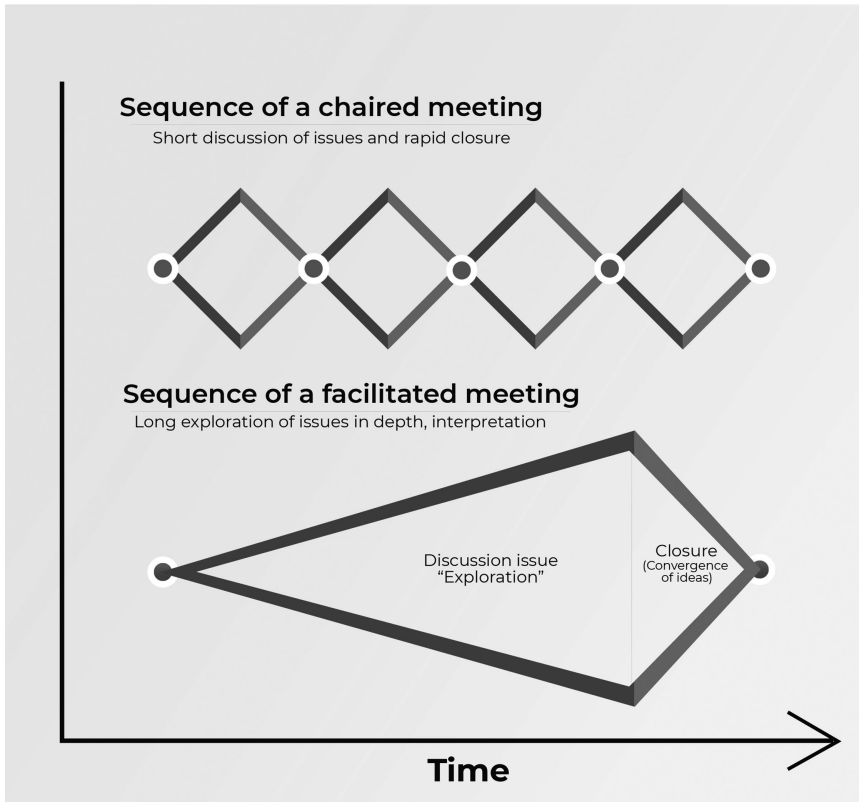


Figure 6.5 Long 'exploration' phase in facilitated meetings vs. chaired meetings

Getting excited – creating social energy and commitment to the process

In any community-based change process like ACM or community development, the first question for facilitators is always: why would people be excited to engage actively and take ownership? What would motivate them and bring out their energy? Why would they accept and trust outsiders starting social processes?

Outsiders/facilitators work normally on many differing assumptions about the motivation of local communities. To alleviate their fears of rejection, outsiders often try to obtain a smooth entry by promising the so-called 'trust building measures'. They may give the local people some direct immediate material benefits, which are envisaged to bridge the gap and reduce uncertainty. But once such benefits are given, be they a sitting allowance¹ or promises of development benefits, the perspective of entitlement will long persist and the foundation of the relationship is set: that of beneficiaries and benefactors. It is hard to transform such

beginnings into self-propelled, truly community-owned processes, as expectations have been raised in a specific, dependent way.

Substantive trust is built through being genuine and by sharing the same values and expectations rather than by gifts. It requires consistency in explaining and demonstrating what the true intentions are over a longer period. Trust in such interventions needs to be earned by outsiders (and as Liswanti et al. and Fisher et al., both this volume, show, such trust can endure).

A community process which aims to become a self-driven and community-owned process – as ACM aspires to – requires more than a meeting for the start. Some basic principles and steps based on our experience include:

- **Addressing the community as an organisation:** First, the community needs to be seen and addressed as an organisational system, not a set of individuals. If one would do a project with a formal organisation, one would respect the different levels of management and authority and discuss with the respective levels to create commitment and agreements to start off. Similarly in a community, one needs to identify the different levels of leadership (often based on both traditional and more formal, government-initiated organisational structures), engage them in discussions, understand their perspectives, help them understand what the intentions are and get permission to do some scoping and enquiry by interviewing a range of different people from different social strata. This will provide a first basic understanding to the facilitators/outside; and the insights inform the facilitator in the development of an appropriate process design. This step builds relationships, clarifies expectations to some degree and reduces the likelihood of conflict.

With these insights, the facilitators can return later to the leadership and inform them in a small meeting about some critical points, share ideas on what a future process could look like and agree on the way forward. Ultimately, this will result in organising a big community meeting as a next step to engage the broader community.

- **Opening up, breaking entrenched communication patterns and developing critical consciousness:** In the community workshop, the role of the facilitator is crucial. In most societies, a more hierarchical setting in meetings is the norm: the powerful talk, others listen, leaders stand in front of the group, giving long speeches, etc. This is what many people are used to, they expect it and at the same time they are often bored by these hierarchical communication patterns. They are thus not excited to come to meetings; the sitting allowances often become the biggest incentive to attend.

It is of great importance to start in a very different way: breaking these communication patterns by getting everybody to talk right from the beginning, contributing already in the introduction stage in small groups, responding to interesting questions. The goal is that each individual feels he or she has made a contribution, been recognised and is important, a source of knowledge.

Managing expectations is central at that stage, not promising outside solutions, but throwing the ball back to their own thinking. Challenging the status quo and through critical questions bringing out key factors which have led them to the status quo. This process of developing critical consciousness and analysis is supported through Paulo Freire's 'Pedagogy of the Oppressed' (Freire 1970, 1973). This thinking led to 'Training for Transformation' (Hope and Timmel 1984), which provides facilitation tools to open people up, make them challenge their situations, creating ownership of their problems and their own solutions. 'Codes' (see Figure 6.6) depicting certain common situations in stories, pictures and wisdom have been very effective in facilitation of this opening process as they raise real-life situations in a coded way, so people can relate and talk openly about similar issues they face. Codes can be in the form of pictures, videos, role plays and also learning tools which make biophysical/environmental process easy to understand and relate to (see Haggmann and Chuma 2002; Ramaru, Chuma and Haggmann 2014). Often social differentiation when dealing with issues is important so that different strata of society can bring out their perspectives on issues clearly and then negotiate a common perspective.

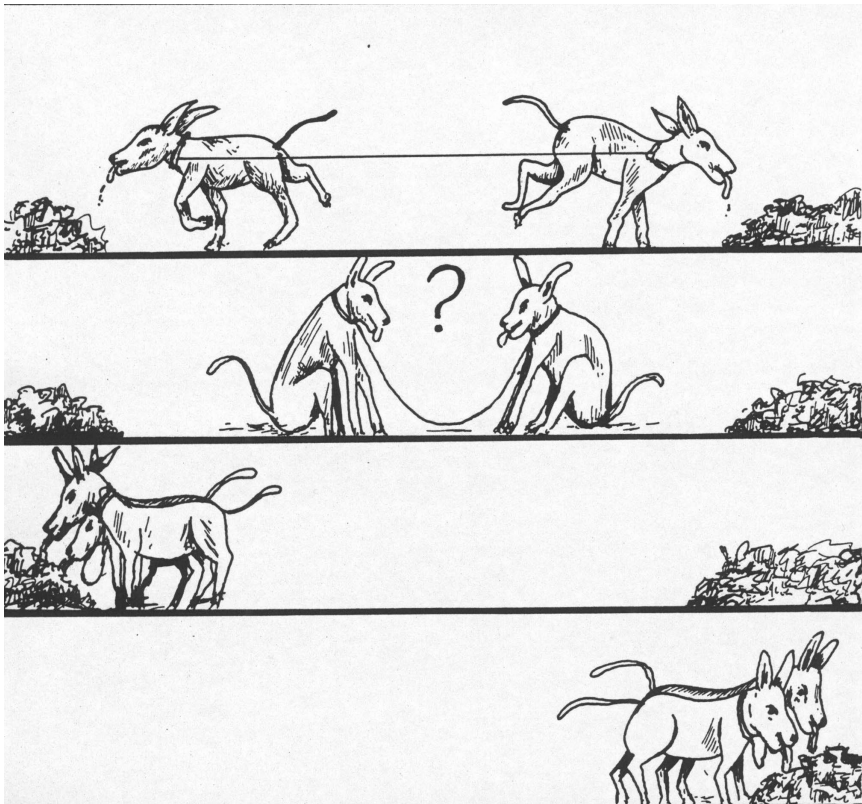


Figure 6.6 Example of a code in facilitation: the donkey code, portraying collaboration issues

This intensive, concentrated process has always been very energising (social energy) as it excites and empowers people to embrace their own values and issues, talk about the real issues and needs, and realise that they have the power to change the situation – this creates commitment to the process. It is important in such beginnings, not to dismiss the leadership, but equally challenge them in a positive and supportive way without any loss of face. They need to be supportive, while the facilitation process itself is reducing the hierarchy and power distance in local communication patterns and is socially inclusive.

Managing inclusiveness (gender, age, wealth, ethnicity, power)

Communities as organisations are typically extremely heterogenous in their composition. In most contexts, some groups are notoriously excluded or at least not adequately recognised in their needs and aspirations. Inclusivity through ‘managing inclusiveness’ is a central concept in F4C, in order to mobilise the whole community for positive action and sharing of benefits for everyone. It is a combination of social differentiation and negotiation to arrive at inclusive goals, actions and benefits (Ngwenya and Hagmann 2009).

The first step to manage inclusiveness is to know the diversity of groups. In the initial interviews, some groups/interests might reveal themselves but often more analysis and enquiry are needed. The fundamental social differentiation criteria are gender, age, wealth, power, ethnicity, but when going deeper it is important to understand the different interest groups as well (e.g., farmers, foresters and forest owners/users), also groups formed by development interventions and government. Once these are clear through an institutional analysis and other scoping measures, the facilitator can bring out the different groups’ interests and expectations. Small working groups of the subgroups are an effective tool to bring out their interests, expectations and solutions, inviting them to present back to the plenary/community. This makes the differences transparent and allows then for proper negotiation in terms of solutions and benefits. In the end, what matters is the negotiation for agreed ways forward where the different interests are recognised and taken into account. Again, it is fundamental for the facilitator to change the patterns of communication for effective inclusion and give voice to the different groups in a subtle and socially acceptable way.

Managing complexity – first things first

In community processes, almost always a long list of problems/challenges emerges. Most are rather ‘wants’ than ‘needs’ and often inspired by what the outsider is perceived to be able to provide rather than what really would enable the community to act for themselves. How can we deal with such diverse and complex issues and interests – where to start?

The first principle is: don’t start too quickly with just anything which seems reasonable. A lot of facilitated negotiation is required to come to the really pressing issues that hinder the community to move to the next level. For example, in Tanzania, we once had a case where after all the nice things people wanted to

embark on, the women were assertive and insisted on priority No. 1 to extinguish the illegal brewing of a toxic alcohol which had devastating effects, particularly on the men. Initially not even on the list of possible actions, it turned out to be the biggest block for development of their area, emerging only after long discussions and several meetings. As we did not provide any resources except for facilitation, we made it a condition that any action must be accomplished by the community themselves. The women mobilised and organised the whole community, made a plan and within a month, to our surprise, all illegal brewers were stopped. After this positive experience of their power and dedication, they embarked on the next big things with great confidence (see similar examples in Johnson and Pokorny 2022).

What this example shows is that the real priorities are felt and need to be brought out. 'Drowning in complexity' and a myriad of things which all seem important simultaneously and are all totally interconnected... is paralysing rather than empowering. It is important to get rather quickly to the 'first things first' attitude, start with small things which can be done, create the feeling of success and empowerment, and move on to bigger things. This confidence building process develops pride in the community which breeds more excitement and social energy, readiness and stick-to-it-iveness to tackle other issues that come along.

Building a functioning community organisation

A community is a very diverse and heterogenous form of an organisational setting. Lots of formal and informal institutions and groups exist in parallel, often with similar functions. In addition, in many contexts, there is a whole graveyard of institutions formed by development interventions which have died once the incentives by the development agency were stopped. Officially, these groups and institutions remain, dysfunctional, but never dissolved – often without members or action. Indeed, this is part of the reality that spurred the development of approaches like ACM.

The first step in developing stronger organisations in communities is an institutional/organisational analysis which identifies what kind of local institutions/organisations are around, which ones are really functioning for what purpose, their strengths and weaknesses, and what the interactions and relationships between these entities are.

This analysis is ideally done by the outside facilitator team with a mandate from the community. The insights and results will be brought back to a community meeting where they will be discussed, validated (or corrected) and implications for the community's development brought out. Often, the perspectives on challenges and opportunities differ, but once the different perspectives of people's challenges in their communities and organisations are presented, it is a reality which cannot be wiped out and ignored. For example, in one case in Zimbabwe, people identified the fact that some individuals were monopolising leadership opportunities as a core problem. Surely that leader did not like it, but the public and intensive factual debates were powerful and accepted by the community. Ultimately, the community formed a new by-law which no longer allowed multiple

leadership positions by one person. This opened up the community organisation drastically and many blockages disappeared. Important here is that it is not the facilitator who judges the findings; it is the community members who interpret, judge and make decisions. The facilitator only facilitates the discussions, making sure people understand that this is their own problem and not the outsiders' problem, that solutions lie in their own hands, rather than outsiders'.

Local organisational development is a core concept in F4C (Hagmann and Schwedersky 2000). There are many ways and forms for developing stronger organisations for different purposes. One model which was very successful in South Africa (Ficarelli et al. 2003), for example, is the 'umbrella organisation' which is composed of representatives of the institutions that really function and have a role in the community. This umbrella supports its members, making sure that knowledge is shared across these groups and institutions and dealing with broader community development aspects. It ensured considerable inclusiveness in a diverse setting. Before leadership was nominated, intensive debates on qualities of leaders, roles of leaders, dos and don'ts of leaders and members, how to remove a leader, etc., were discussed in small groups, and re-discussed several times until there was agreement within the large group. These were consolidating the values and principles of leadership. As these rules and norms came from the community, each new leader knew what he/she was supposed to do and not do. And the members felt empowered to claim accountability as this was agreed before he/she took the position. The facilitators' role was to guide the discussions, ask the right questions in a neutral way and share ideas of other places he/she had seen as an inspiration. All decisions were made by the community itself.

Managing conflicts

There are different types of conflicts in communities, which must be dealt with in very different ways: open conflicts vs. hidden conflicts, personal conflicts vs. interest-based conflicts. What they have in common is that they are sucking energy and are a blockage in the development process. In cultures where social harmony is a highly desired state, conflict has a very negative connotation and people can be ready to hide it and give in, rather than deal with it. As a facilitator, often it is even difficult to recognise a conflict as it is not spoken out, and only a good process observation indicates that something is not flowing, which might be an underlying conflict.

So, the first step is to identify conflicts and understand what type of conflict it is. For example, a conflict between different types of land use by different groups reveals itself relatively clearly (e.g., in an ACM process). Like in any conflict resolution process, one would go deep into the different interests of the parties (away from positions). Critical analysis hopefully would uncover some common ground and possibly rules, by laws and new technologies which could enable a better benefit and win-win for the different parties through cooperation.

When it comes to hidden conflicts, it is more complicated. We had cases where two families and individuals in a community had issues going back a generation; they could not work together. Each tried to sabotage whatever the other

was doing. There is no way an outsider can know this, but all community members may understand. Often, these issues only come out in informal discussions in trustful relationships. Traditional societies also have their own ways to solve issues, which often are very different from a Western way, much more informal, using trusted third parties and mediating/negotiating behind closed doors. A facilitator for change has to have a feel for what conflicts are above or below ground and navigate accordingly. Only the local people can help to understand and often to solve it. A facilitator must allow local people to come into the process, support/help and create forums, like a process steering group, where process issues can be discussed rather openly.

Managing knowledge, innovation and creativity

Knowledge is key in facilitated processes aimed at emancipation and self-empowerment of communities. There are several challenges to manage:

- In oral cultures – mainly speaking of rural Africa – ‘traditional’ knowledge is mainly stored in stories, wisdom and experiences in an adaptive way and is often considered (by educated people) as inferior to the ‘modern’, science-based knowledge. The latter in rural communities has been pushed by state extension services, originating in colonial and often missionary systems and approaches. So, we are dealing with knowledge systems that are granted unequal prestige and value. The challenge is to combine traditional and modern in a positive way to find solutions to problems rather than classifying the knowledge.
- Access to external and alien knowledge and innovation has been rather limited in rural communities until recently through the internet. Technical services in forestry and agriculture, for example, are weak in many countries and often out of date with their technologies and approaches.
- Scientific knowledge generally comes in a rather academic form, often not grounded in the local context and experiences, which slows down adoption and adaptation.

Facilitated processes like ACM have to integrate technical know-how with indigenous knowledge and into social processes effectively. In our experience, an effective way to integrate different knowledge types and processes is experimentation by the land users. Once the real problems and interests are clear, people are encouraged to experiment with old and new ideas, combine them and analyse the results. This solution-finding process enables several benefits:

- First, communities and people become experimenters and unleash their creativity. No technology can be pre-assessed as superior, what counts is the result in their context and any idea is useful.
- Second, in this process peoples’ analytical capacity by comparing and analysing different solutions is enhanced and results in deeper understanding of underlying issues.

- Third, the integration of scientific and traditional knowledge is happening naturally and adaptively and strengthens people's confidence in their own capacity.

The role of the facilitator is to link people to many sources of innovation, be it from research, innovative land users/communities, experts or academia. Exposure to new knowledge is critical to enhance creativity and expand experimentation. The facilitator team also needs to actively bring technical services and experts into the process.

The second role of the facilitator is to encourage experimentation at larger scales and sharing across people and communities. A range of mechanisms can be effective. For example, in Zimbabwe, South Africa and the Dominican Republic, we used competitions for the best ideas, where every community member could participate. The communities with the highest number of good ideas won. And the individuals with the best ideas won in each community, which then created a powerful incentive for everyone to experiment. In our experiences, this created enormous energy to be creative and think in solutions rather than problems, a very important perspective in ACM processes (Yuliani et al., this volume). And even the poorest could participate and be recognised for their great ideas. It lowered the barriers between the rich and the poor as both could make major contributions in their own right and both were recognised. It strengthened inclusiveness.

Knowledge management in ACM-type processes is critical. Active sharing of knowledge and experiences and the ideas coming out of experimentation and documenting the knowledge are major elements of that.

Facilitation at multiple levels (integration)

The integration of different levels of change was briefly mentioned above. The aim is to enable the development of a system which can perpetuate itself. For example, in ACM, the first level of change was initially in communities, and in some cases organisational levels (Colfer, Prabhu and Larson 2022; Komarudin et al. 2012). If this is successful, it is obvious that for large-scale implementation, the technical forestry services need to adapt, change the capacity of their field officers, change the way they provide services, their approaches, their internal working arrangements, etc. This change process in the technical forestry service does not come on its own, it needs to be facilitated. Once the technical services are on board, they will say that we need to change the policies and regulations at the national level, which are almost always initially antagonistic to such bottom-up approaches. Again, such changes don't come on their own; they require facilitation of change across the levels, encouraging interactions among the different levels, identifying the changes required to make things a success, considering new modalities on how to operate, working arrangements, etc. In the end, it is a multi-level change process of facilitation, all triggered and driven by the change needs of the primary delivery level, the community. Such multi-level

processes become very complex very quickly, as Prabhu, Larson and Colfer (2022) also experienced. These processes need to be anticipated strategically at an early stage and designed smartly. The facilitation competence at different levels also differs as political levels operate differently than service providers and communities. In many cases, innovation platforms and multiple stakeholder platforms are required to get the different relevant actors together to make a system work better (Ngwenya and Haggmann, 2011; see also Fisher et al. and Kusumanto et al., both this volume) (Figure 6.7).

Managing the facilitator's biases

Facilitators in a change process are never really neutral, even if they don't have clear vested interests. Knowing one's biases is important in order to deal with them and be clear about what is happening. In the processes described above, the facilitator's main agenda is to make people empower themselves, be more creative, become better organised, more solution-oriented, better negotiators and enhance communication within and across people and communities. These in themselves are clear agendas with clear values and mind models one needs to be aware of. The facilitation methodologies may well also emanate from different knowledge systems than those of the communities.

It is desirable to bring in new ideas and ways of dealing with issues in systems – without innovation, there will be no development. The key is that the values

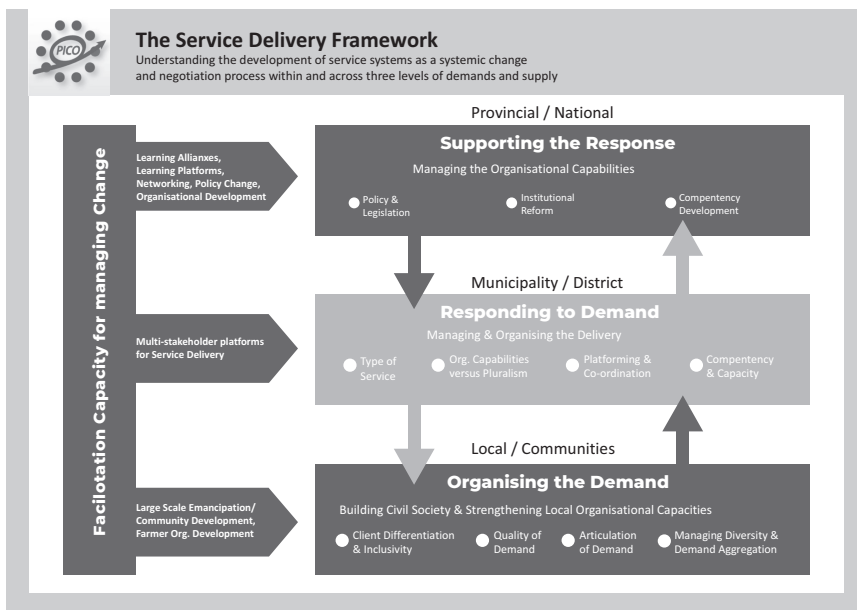


Figure 6.7 Example of a multi-level facilitation process to foster change in service delivery (Haggmann et al. 2002a)

underlying these ideas are shared, neither imposed by outsiders nor creating or reinforcing notions of ‘inferior’ and ‘superior’ ideas.

Fundamentally in our experience, the attitude of a facilitator is most crucial, respecting the way people handle their issues and creating space for them to do it in their own way, respecting different cultures and values. Once this attitude is achieved, and the values in the facilitation are open and transparent, the facilitator’s biases will not lead to imposition. People have the choice of making their own judgements and decisions.

What this means for the facilitator’s personality is that he/she should be highly self-aware and able to have a critical distance from his or her own work, allowing critical voices to be heard and engaging with diverse perspectives in a positive and humble way.

F4C is a demanding concept and practice. We have developed our own capacity over the years and were privileged to have ample opportunities to practise in a range of processes. We have systematised and conceptualised our learning and experience in frameworks, guides, etc. However, ultimately facilitation is exciting because it requires constantly ‘thinking on your feet’; it is full of surprises which don’t fit into any frameworks and depend heavily on one’s personality and style. There is a lot of uncertainty in these processes and people have different ways to deal with uncertainty. Ultimately, a facilitator needs to feel secure in his/her own insecurity. Authenticity is a factor which makes it genuine and true and trustful and has a major effect on groups. Therefore, it requires more than just multiplying the facilitation methods in a standard training way with standard procedures. Developing facilitation capacity is never bringing out the same styles; we are all different as individuals. What is important then is the development of one’s own style within the mindset and values of facilitation.

Capacity for facilitation of social learning processes

The sections above have clearly revealed that the process facilitators/managers’ capacity is one of the most crucial determinants for a successful ACM-type intervention. The development of this capacity is another substantive challenge in any intervention. These are capability profiles which cannot easily be picked from the labour market, so in the design of a programme such competences need to be built in, as a well-planned component. Here, we deepen the understanding of such capacity development processes.

Key skills and competences of a facilitator for social learning at multiple levels

The majority of capabilities required are in the domain of soft capacities and soft skills. In our experience, it is often a process of personal transformation, which has impacts on one’s personality way beyond the professional arena, particularly when it comes to social and communication skills, emotional intelligence,

creativity, curiosity (Goleman 1988) and the confidence to take and shape one's life on one's own initiative.

In our programmes, we found the following five competence domains critical for facilitators of community-based interventions.

Vision and values

Facilitators need to have a clear vision of what 'development' is supposed to be, with an emphasis on human development in communities. A process-oriented development process might be a different vision from that of the mainstream and needs to be nurtured. For example, if a forestry officer who has been working within the conventional paradigm and vision of most forest bureaus is supposed to become an ACM champion, he/she will clearly have to transform his/her vision/imagination for development.

The other dimension is human values. As elaborated before, sharing the same values in interventions is critical. Values are rarely obvious and explicit, but inherent. They show up in the form of behaviours. In our experience, it required substantive work to become self-aware of one's own values and other people's values and how to deal with value differences. This included the human values of interaction and its manifestation in communication (e.g., how do you communicate verbally and non-verbally in such a way that you respect other people, independent of status and hierarchy? What is important for people to feel they have co-created and contributed? etc.). It's a self-experienced 'learning as one goes'. Role plays and analysis have always been good tools to discover such aspects of oneself.

Conceptual understanding

Mental models are critical in guiding our actions. That is why a conceptual understanding of action learning and process approaches, as well as ACM itself, is crucial. Often, one shies away from discussing conceptual work with field officers as such ideas appear too difficult and intellectual. However, they are fundamental as a guiding framework for action. If a concept is too difficult to understand, it might be more a communication problem than the concept itself. It just requires effort to explain complex issues in simple words. Good analogies from real-world experience have always helped to illustrate complex issues and simplify (bringing the point 'home' – in other words use examples of daily life to explain).

Another conceptual dimension which a facilitator needs to understand is the functioning of social systems (also rural livelihood systems) and their behaviours and needs, including how self-organisation works, how technology contributes to development, and relevant methods and approaches.

Personal development, emotional intelligence and soft skills

The most difficult skill set for a facilitator is around personal development. It is not something which one can learn in a few sessions; it requires active engagement and working on self-development, which we all know is difficult.

The whole concept and skill set around emotional intelligence has been very helpful to enhance practitioners' empathy and self-awareness. Some other important skills and behaviours are as follows:

- Attitude – taking people seriously independent of status, education and power,
- Empathy, patience and authenticity,
- Creativity, innovation and curiosity,
- Flexibility and solution orientation,
- The ability to deal with uncertainty and insecurity,
- Humbleness – understanding that it is not about you as a facilitator – you are just a catalyst,
- The understanding that you can't force people to do things; you can only influence their decisions to change behaviour and thinking.

Most of those are reflected in the deep values and beliefs in facilitation: participatory engagement, recognising any knowledge in the system and appreciating the resources/the value of people's knowledge.

This personal development is often a challenge for technically trained specialists who may feel that they are more educated and have a higher status than the so-called uneducated villagers. Naturally, they cling to their educated knowledge which gives them superiority. It is a major transformation for them to accept local knowledge as equal and sit in the boat of rural communities and earn a different form of respect and recognition. But it is necessary.

Facilitation skills

The most fundamental skills a facilitator should have are:

Foundation facilitation techniques based on group dynamics and principles of adult education. These are a must for facilitators. Group dynamics provides a good skill set to manage groups, while adult learning provides deep insights and tools on how to engage adults through exploration of their experience and learning based on that experience.

Team development techniques are essential in facilitation to understand how teams function, their dynamics and how they can be developed.

Questioning techniques are the backbone of facilitation. Asking the right question at the right time is what triggers lively debates, solution searching and challenging of the status quo and people's own behaviours. It is a difficult skill, linked to one's own vision of development and understanding of human beings and their behaviour in organisations. Some concepts like 'strategic questioning' (Peavey 1990) and elements of provocative therapy (Farely and Brandsma 1981) and organisational development provide good stimulation. Often, good questions originate in the facilitator's imagination and understanding of the issues, raising issues in the form of questions instead of comments, etc.

Visualisation is the visual language of facilitation. It's a skill which is very important for effective communication with the audience, for memorising and

building on points agreed and discussed, and preventing 'going round and round'. Even more important with illiterate audiences, it does not need sophisticated ways of visualising; a simple flipchart visualisation can be effective. Creativity helps!

Storytelling, codes, analogies and a good sense of humour are powerful ways to bring out issues in an indirect way. They are great skills for a facilitator to make sessions lively and avoid loss of face for participants by being too direct.

Managerial and planning skills

A facilitator always has a process management task. This requires some basic management skills like action planning and different planning approaches as well as reporting skills. Process documentation is extremely important for both the audience and the facilitator. Without good process documentation, issues can get lost, making it hard to manage a good reflection process and build on the previous interaction. This does not have to be sophisticated – in areas without electricity it will be done by simple note taking.

Developing systemic facilitation competence

From a conventional training perspective, the skills and competences described are probably overwhelming and one may envision hundreds of training courses to develop them. Most likely, all these courses would not do the job in developing a rounded competent facilitator. All too often, there is no direct linkage between training inputs and challenges faced on the job. Consequently, most professionals do not apply what is learnt on training courses; training remains as mere information which, if not applied, will be forgotten over time. Knowledge does not develop through participating in a one-off training session: this requires well-designed learning processes.

Through our own learning over our first decade (Hagemann et al. 2003), we found an alternative to conventional training to support people in learning these skills and competences in a more iterative way, based on real-life practice. The learning programme is not about 'training' and then 'doing'; it is an integrated process of learning as we go, in practice and real life. The programme does not have training modules per se, but a set of core competencies which are developed, simultaneously guided by the field process and its challenges emerging.

The basic structure of such a learning programme called 'systemic competence development' (Hagemann et al. 2009) is:

- 1 At least four to five **learning workshops** with a group of 25–30 participants over 12–18 months.
- 2 **Peer learning teams** to support implementation of field practice.
- 3 Several months of **field practice** between the workshops where key steps of the process are managed by small teams.
- 4 **Coaching and mentoring in the field** by the learning facilitators, guiding the field practice and reflection.

In the first workshop, basic concepts are discussed, the overall process of F4C is elaborated and the broader context understood. Ideally, a field visit to sites where this work has been implemented helps participants to better imagine such processes. Then at the end of the first workshop, peer learning teams are formed as small groups of people who will be assigned to a community in which they will practise F4C in community development for the next two years. They will plan together as a team the first few steps in entering the community. These stages are role played to better understand and coach the teams to come up with a detailed workplan for the next two to three months in the field. The learning facilitators will coach these groups several times in the field during these first two to three months, so that they feel secure enough to do the work. They face a lot of challenges, things don't work out as planned and it can be messy. If not supported and coached, the field workers will prefer to return to their comfort zone and act as they always did – authoritarian and instructive instead of being consultative and facilitatory, experiences which Cronkleton, Evans and Larson (2022) faced in Latin America too.

In the second and subsequent learning workshops, the teams first process their experiences in depth, what happened, what worked and what did not.... and share with other teams. The workshop focuses on the big challenges they faced, identifies solutions, shows new methods and ways to deal with the issues they have experienced, organises some role plays, etc. Then, concepts are deepened, new ones introduced and the next few steps in the process are discussed in depth and another detailed workplan is developed. The teams go out and practise for another three to four months. The sequence continues until workshop 5, after which they have practised the whole process in the communities. Specifically, after the third workshop, a leap in understanding has often been observed. The participants break out of their linearity and start thinking more systemically, able to bring the complexity into one frame and deal with it (Figure 6.8).

As openness and self-development are such critical competences in participatory action research, the teams really practise a feedback culture and one can literally see how they grow in their confidence over time. The appreciation they receive in the communities also shapes a positive attitude to local people; they identify with the communities and sit in the same boat.

After 18 months to 2 years, the group has reached maturity – they can handle the process as competent facilitators by themselves and take on new ones. On average, a third of the participants have developed excellent facilitation skills (they become trainers/learning facilitators later on), another third is good in practice and about a third continues to struggle. As a follow-up and further development, learning networks and communities of practice are created where the different cohorts share their experiences and new ideas.

The systemic competence development process is intensive and requires a very serious commitment in terms of plans and finances. Often, we have been asked if this cannot be reduced to two training courses. It can't! It is an investment in human capacity which can turn an intervention into a great success within two years. But it needs a longer-term perspective.

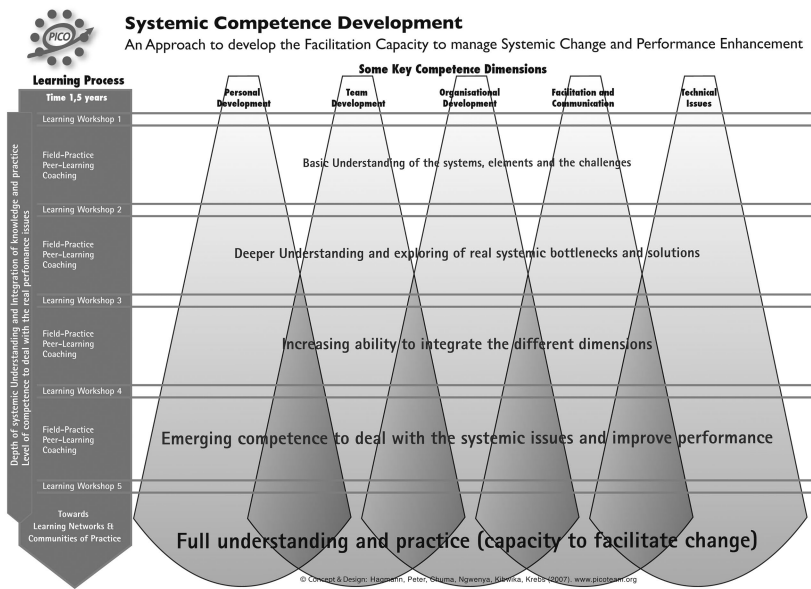


Figure 6.8 The process of systemic competence development (Hagmann et al. 2009)

In South Africa, we have developed more than 350 community facilitators through this process, in Zimbabwe also more than 100 at a time and in the Dominican Republic, some 50. Many of those well-skilled facilitators are highly marketable and often left their organisation for a better job within two years, as particularly the public sector could not provide incentives for them to stay. In all cases, we have rapidly developed second groups of learners and made the best facilitators their learning facilitators, so that the rapid turnover of good people could be buffered and did not undermine the future of good programmes.

In Uganda, we have developed this ‘innovation’ capacity within the university – with lecturers and professors, and the process was slightly differently focused but equally highly successful (Hagmann, Kibwika and Ekwamu 2009). The systemic competence development process works very well, but it is intensive and expensive. Looking at many existing development interventions, it might still be the most cost-effective way to invest. Deloitte (2019) comes to similar conclusions in their paper on the future of work where they conclude that capabilities are the fundamentals – not skills.

In future, with the rapid development of social platforms, many of the more technical skills involved can be learnt through blended learning with an increasing smartphone penetration in different contexts. Whether this will work well for the behavioural change aspects in becoming a facilitator for social learning, is yet to be seen.

Conclusion

There are five main conclusions of this paper:

- 1 The role of facilitation in ACM-type collective learning processes has often been unrecognised and underestimated. Few initiatives have experienced high-quality facilitation to appreciate the depth and quality needed. It looks like an easy skill which can be learnt quickly and so many programmes look for a weeklong facilitation skill course, send their field officers out in the communities and become terribly disappointed by facilitation, as the impact is very limited.
- 2 Facilitation in ACM-type social learning process interventions needs to be considered and planned as a multi-level change process driven by the experiences in the communities. When it is not planned like that in the beginning, resources are not available to address other levels, and programmes get stuck.
- 3 Investment is needed in the development of adequate facilitation and process management capacity at different levels, right from the beginning of initiatives. It is intensive and can be expensive but forms the foundation of longer-term success. Therefore, it needs to be in the programme design and plans.
- 4 For change to succeed, the incentives of the different players need to be considered, from villagers to bureaucrats. Social energy can mobilise good commitment and needs to be supplemented by rules that incentivise self-perpetuation of new approaches.
- 5 Facilitation is changing rapidly in the digitalised era through social platforms. The question remains how optimally the facilitation of social learning in rural/forest communities can be complemented by social platforms in a blended way, without losing the depth and quality required. Depending on the context and the increasing availability of smartphones, this might be a great future opportunity.

Note

- 1 A 'sitting allowance' is an amount of money paid to individuals for their participation in meetings, a common practice in many developing countries.

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