

TALARIA FACILITATION METHOD (TFM):

TFM is used in the Talaria Intercultural Interaction Skills (TIIS) Workshop

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FIRST THINGS FIRST

I first cooked up the Talaria Facilitation Method (TFM) over many tropical evenings sipping cold (warm during the frequent electricity interruptions) San Miguel beer on my porch in a small Philippines town on the South China Sea. This was at the very beginning of the tumultuous post-Marcos years – the first two years after Reagan pulled the plug on the long-time president from Ilocos Norte province.

TFM is used to facilitate and structure the discussion phase of experiential problem-solving learning activities. An experiential problem-solving approach supports the workplace performance improvement purpose of a training program. While the method is universally effective with participant groups and trainers from all cultures, it is particularly powerful with audiences and trainers from cultures which hold hierarchical, indirect, and risk-averse values. The elements comprising TFM systematically provide conditions whereby participants learn how to safely and comfortably participate in an active, independent and assertive mode. In the same vein, when trainers from hierarchical, indirect, and risk-averse cultures learn to use the method, they can gain active and assertive participation from any cultural training group. A by-product of participating in the method is overall problem-solving skill enhancement on the part of trainers and participants.

Of course, many training programs today use experiential learning activities such as written critical incidents, dramatizations, role plays, case studies, simulations and guided visualization. These techniques provide concrete, specific scenarios in which work problems arise. They are also tremendous for mining the treasure trove of past intercultural experiences people have had without even knowing they had them. Experiential learning methodology is the most powerful way to attach meaning to past experiences. Please note that experiential learning methodology is different from interaction training methodology, which consists of doing the training out in the workplace in the moment. This methodology can be used but in general, is costly and often doesn't yield the needed learnable moments.

In a typical activity these days, participants read a critical incident or observe a scripted drama and then the follow-up discussion begins. The facilitator asks the following questions:

“What happened?”

“How would you feel in this situation if you were Liam?”

“What did you learn?”

“What will you do if you are in this situation?”

“ Why?”

Experiential activities like this are often used in training programs. Too often though, this type of activity is followed by a short discussion with a few select questions, such as those offered above. Although these questions may stimulate some reflection and discussion, they often fail to lead the participants in a clear direction toward improved workplace performance. A systematic and structured approach to the follow-up discussion can make the activity more meaningful for the participants, contributing to more effective transfer of learning to effective workplace performance.

TFM is a specific approach to the facilitation of experiential learning activity discussions. Effective facilitation of TFM leads participants through an actual problem-solving and decision-making process.

At the core of TFM is a problem-solving framework that identifies the five stages through which the facilitator leads the participants during the follow-up discussion:

1. **Behavior and problem identification:** Identify specific behaviors and summarize problems/challenges for the scenario character (the scenario character with the problem always represents the profile of the participant group – in this case, global leaders.)
2. **Cause Analysis:** Explanation of possible underlying causes and provision of content related to problems/challenges.
3. **Brainstorming of Alternatives:** List possible alternative actions the character might take to achieve his/her goal.
4. **Analysis:** Analyze consequences of various alternative actions.
5. **Application and Practice:** The primary application consists of practicing the target skill during the workshop and then of course later in the workplace as well.

Terminology

Please note that the terms “trainer” and “facilitator” are used interchangeably in this article. “ICD” refers to Intercultural Competence Development.

A Case of Contrasts: University Model vs. Performance-Based Experiential Model

An effective way to understand something is to examine its contrast. TFM and its elements of performance-based training and problem solving experiential learning methodology can be contrasted to the university model of training. If you haven't done so already, please read the Welcome page of this website, where you will find a brief introductory comparison of the two.

What does effective performance-based training program participation look like?

The main job of a trainer/facilitator is to provide quality content and communicate it with a learning and performance process that enables active participation. Active participation results in better transfer of learning to workplace performance. The following select participant behaviors (a through k) constitute effective training program performance:

- a) From the beginning of the session, periodically write down in your own words a summary of your learning and when you will apply the skills being presented and practiced back in the workplace.
- b) Make comments that link the material with your own professional experiences.
- c) Look at other learners and listen to their comments and questions. Take notes and expand upon what they say. Speak to the group – make eye contact with everyone, not only the trainer.
- d) Build on others' comments to develop ideas.
- e) Offer different perspectives from other learners, the facilitator, and the material.
- f) Always think about and state how the training can help you do your job better.
- g) Offer your perspective on how your anticipated workplace performance improvement will contribute to organizational effectiveness.
- h) Ask others to share their experiences and suggestions.
- i) You are responsible for changing your workplace performance. If the session isn't helping you to change your job behavior, give this feedback to the facilitator.
- j) Actively participate in practice exercises and activities. Give and receive feedback with the facilitator and other participants.
- k) Actively engage in any pre-program and post-program activities – including the use of job aids and consulting Cultural Guides.

Granted, these are ideal behaviors. TFM significantly moves participants toward this kind of job-based training program participation, which in turn increases the potential for learning transfer to the workplace.

Imagine the following thought in a training program participant's head an hour before the program starts:

“Hmm, I wonder what kind of behaviors will enable me to perform effectively as a participant in this training program, thereby leading me to transfer my learning to improved workplace

performance, and this in turn contributing to my organization's effectiveness. What will my role as a learner look like today?"

Forgive the run-on sentence, but I think that is what it would sound like in someone's head. While sometimes there are participants who think like that, in all my years of experience, it is unusual.

The above is a reminder that in the current state of facilitated Intercultural Competence Development (ICD), participants from all cultures are, in general, relatively passive and dependent upon the trainer. In general, there is often a low degree of performance-based active participation (a through k above).

Cultural differences impact the degree of active participation practice. While the active participation limitations identified above are fairly universal, they are often even stronger in hierarchical and indirect cultures. Of course in those cultures, people have their way of learning toward workplace performance (Take long breaks with a Chinese audience in China so that they can come to you individually with their questions). The point here is that the default "training program culture" of most training programs everywhere is generally one of relative participant passivity. A simple explanation is that, for most people, their primary experience with education is that of the formal school system. Then in the organizational world, many training programs replicate the formal school system by using the university model of training. So, many participants, having been conditioned to passivity in the formal school system, have not learned how to actively participate.

TFM directly battles all of this formal education experience baggage that people bring with them to the organizational world. TFM is a cultural adaptation which enables universal active training participation. It also enables facilitators who generally feed into this passive process, through use of the university model, to facilitate job-based active participation.

Use of TFM as a Strategic Organizational Intervention

As participants experience TFM over time, their training program participation skills continue to grow along with their ability to transfer learning to the workplace. This in turn improves their overall participation in any kind of training or learning & performance intervention. In addition, it positively impacts their ability to more actively participate in problem solving meetings.

Comments from Others

Once facilitators are able to facilitate TFM, they generally increase their satisfaction level with conducting training programs. Reinart, my friend and Talaria collaborator, put it to me in the following way:

Ah Patty Boy, give me participant disagreement and challenging, contrary opinions, and demand that the program help them with their jobs. That's why I like using TFM – it gets people going. The sessions are much more dynamic and therefore increase my own job satisfaction and interest.

Below are some comments from members of the intercultural training team in the Philippines with whom I collaborated in the original development of TFM way back when. We all worked together in a large United Nations Indochinese refugee processing center in the Philippines. Most of the refugees were "boat people" who had escaped their respective countries of Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. We were running intercultural training programs for those who were on their way to re-settle in North America. The "Green Team" included Gerry, Maritess, Edward, Edwin, Fides, and Wowie. At that time, the original name of the method was Structured Learning Activity Processing (SLAP). This moniker was likely a reflection of my sophomoric sense of humor at the time – not that my sense of humor has changed a whole lot.....

–It gives us so much more to work with....

–I really feel like the participants are learning something.....

–Instead of looking for things to fill up time, we never have enough time for follow-up discussion...

–I'm so tired after follow-up discussions, but it feels good...

TFM is the core learning and performance process used in the Talaria Intercultural Interaction Skills (TIIS) Workshop. Talaria also offers a TFM Develop-the-Facilitator Workshop. For the Prince fans at Talaria, it is known as "The Workshop formerly known as the Train-the-Trainer Program."

Applying the critical adult learning principles of experiential and problem-solving learning, TFM is a method that can be used with participant groups for any kind of human interaction – or so-called soft skills - development, including intercultural competence development. Over the years, as I've used it with different trainer and participant groups, the method has remained largely the same.

Using a multi-layered approach, TFM encapsulates performance-based training practices, experiential learning methodology, adult learning principles, and the integration of multiple training techniques into a single method.

The following is a comment from Barbara Baker, former faculty member at the School for International Training regarding TFM:

I see this product as being very useful to the general field of intercultural training. It strikes me as a simple, concrete tool that can be readily explained and utilized, and instrumental in effecting profound changes in training and learning styles...it provides a structured, non-threatening means to encourage and accept various opinions, to think about the consequences of different choices, and to experience creative problem-solving.....I see another application of the method with adolescent and young adult groups to encourage the development of responsible decision making.

You can see from Barbara's comment that TFM could also be a handy tool for parents of rebellious teens.....

The following is a comment from JB Hoover, Founder of iLEAP: Center for Critical Change

Patrick's facilitation method work is groundbreaking for both training practitioners and the participants with whom they work. I've had first-hand experience as a training participant in which the method was used. The first time I experienced it was with Filipino facilitators, who had developed the skill by working with Patrick. They had truly transformed their approach to facilitation. It also transformed the engagement of both American and Asian participants, and was most evident with the Asians. As co-founder and regular session leader at iLEAP: Center for Critical Change, the method has made it into the structure of the organization as well as the training room. I myself have often employed the method with multicultural groups over the years. The method is applicable not only to intercultural training, but any kind of soft skill training.

The Full Description

If you are interested in learning more about TFM, please contact me. Use the contact page on this website or email me at patrick_burns@talariaintercultural.com

Clients who engage in the TFM Develop-the-Facilitator Workshop of course receive the facilitator support material, including a detailed ten-page description of TFM and job aids. The detailed description also serves as an illustration of cultural adaptation dynamics. It is a case of cultural adaptation in which something new was created. It blends egalitarian/direct/risk tolerant and hierarchical/indirect/risk-averse driven learning and facilitation behaviors to create an innovation. In so doing, it becomes something universal.

Thanks for reading.