

Conflict as a Driver for Transformation in Creative Teamwork

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The present article offers new perspectives on how diversity can serve as a driver for transformation in creative teamwork at the point of conflict. The majority of professional design work takes place in teams, and the teaching and facilitation of different aspects of creative teamwork is thus of value in design education. Research shows that diversity supports creativity in groups; however, diversity is also the road to possible conflict (Basadur, 2004; Darsø, 2001; Leonard and Straus, 1997). This article builds on theory and practical applications from the fields of creativity and psychology, as well as a case study where a team of Danish design and Ghanaian art students requests supervision to overcome a conflict. Findings in the present study indicate that helping the team to actively see and appreciate diversity at the point of conflict can lead to transformation at three levels: individual reflection and practice, the relationships and ways of working in the team, and in the project itself, where new choices and opportunities become available.

Keywords: creative teamwork, diversity, conflict, transformation, design education

1. Introduction

The present article sets out to investigate how to facilitate creative teamwork at the point of conflict. It is based on a case study where a team of Danish design and Ghanaian art students are stuck and in a conflict. According to research, such a situation is likely to occur: *"[...] innovation takes place when different ideas, perceptions, and ways of processing and judging information collide. That, in turn, often requires collaboration among various players who see the world in inherently different ways. As a result, the conflict that should take place constructively among ideas all too often ends up taking place unproductively among people who do not innately understand one another. Disputes become personal, and the creative process breaks down"* (Leonard and Straus, 1997, p. 111).

There are several ways in which diversity can be included at the outset of teamwork, for instance by mapping the differences with the help of preference indicators (Basadur, 2004; Leonard and Straus, 1997). However, the question addressed in the present study is how to help teams see and appreciate diversity at the point of conflict, a point where diversity is likely perceived as negative and an obstacle to progress. The facilitation approach is informed by theories and practices from the fields of creativity and psychology and builds on the hypothesis that bringing to light and including the existing diversity in the team at the point of conflict can initiate transformation. 'Including diversity' refers to actively valuing the differences and using them constructively in the creative work process (McLeod, Lobel, and Cox, Jr., 1996).

The paper starts by introducing the single case study approach. Then follows a brief introduction to existing theories about diversity and creative work processes in groups. Next, findings from a previous study of individual creative competencies (Friis, 2012), the creative personality (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996), and the psychological building blocks (Stone and Stone, 1989) are introduced and transferred to the context of teamwork. At this point, the case is presented, relating how the facilitation unfolded. The presentation is followed by a discussion of the

approaches applied in the case, using theoretical lenses to investigate the facilitation and its impact. The article concludes by offering a tentative guideline for how to facilitate the inclusion of diversity at the point of personal conflict in a team.

2. The Single Case Study

"Sometimes, we simply have to keep our eyes open and look carefully at individual cases – not in the hope of proving anything, but rather in the hope of learning something!" (Eysenck in Flyvbjerg, 2011, p. 303).

The present study centers on a single case study, which, according to Flyvbjerg, can be of more value in certain situations than the investigation of several cases, because it comprises more detail, richness, completeness, and depth (Flyvbjerg, 2011). Flyvbjerg proposes that the closeness of the case study to real-life situations is important because, first of all, it is not possible to meaningfully understand human behavior without a nuanced view of reality, which is context-dependent. Secondly, case studies are important for the researcher's own learning process, allowing him to bring his own expertise into play and develop from what Flyvbjerg (2011) terms "[...] *rule-based beginner to virtuoso expert*" (p. 302).

The research approach is explorative, driven by the wish to further understand the complexities of the facilitation process itself. It caught my interest when it seemed to lead to a number of significant changes in the team relations and their subsequent work process. In the words of Stake (1994), *"It's not undertaken primarily because the case represents other cases [...]"*, but because *"in all its particularity and ordinariness, this case itself is of interest"* (p. 237).

As the supervisor, I brought into the situation my experience from the fields of design and psychology, in particular my experience with facilitating individuals and teams in creative work processes. As a participating researcher, my roles have been manifold, engaging with the situation and making sense of it by trying to change it (Reason & Bradbury, 2001). To avoid one of the inherent dangers – the researcher passing along personal opinions and hopes – the case study is 'crisscrossed' with participants' perspectives and reflections, providing a multifaceted account of what transpired.

After the session, I wrote down a first version of the case. To complement my observations, the four members of the team were invited to read my observations and provide feedback based on their experiences. In addition, I have had access to an evaluation report written by the two Danish students in November 2012. In June 2013, the students engaged in interviews about the role of the conflict and what happened before and after the facilitation. Theories are applied in two ways; firstly to inform the facilitation approach, and secondly as lenses to discuss and further investigate the empirical material.

3. Diversity in Creative Teamwork

There are several reasons why researchers suggest that diversity enhances creativity in teams. Some argue that the clash of different perspectives is an enabler of creativity and innovation (Leonard and Straus, 1997). Another

argument focuses on the creative potential of combining knowledge domains which have not previously been combined (Justesen, 2008). A third argument highlights the complexity of the creative process itself, arguing that people have different preferences and talents in relation to the creative process and can benefit from working with individuals who are different from themselves (Basadur, 2004).

While the three arguments are interrelated, it is particularly the last line of thinking that is central to the present study: Most of us have strengths and weaknesses in relation to creative work processes (Basadur, 2004; Friis, 2012). This mirrors the findings of what constitutes the creative personality. According to Csikszentmihalyi (1996), the highly creative person is able to navigate between opposite extremes in himself: *"If I had to express in one word what makes their personalities different from others, it would be complexity."* *"Having a complex personality means being able to express the full range of traits that are potentially present in the human repertoire but usually atrophy because we think that one or the other pole is "good" whereas the other extreme is "bad" (p. 57).*

Csikszentmihalyi describes 10 traits of complexity in exceptionally creative persons, i.e. 10 sets of polarities, for instance the 'Conservative' versus the 'Rebel'. If we are locked into the 'Conservative' nothing new is likely to happen. If we are locked into the 'Rebel', we might lack the patience and respect for existing structures to get the new ideas implemented. Being able to move between the two and having a choice in the matter is, according to Csikszentmihalyi, a trait of the creative person.

In light of Csikszentmihalyi's findings – that most of us prefer one end of a 'pole', and thus have limited access to the other one – one would think that groups have a better chance of covering all the 'poles'. However, the difficulty lies in including the opposite 'poles' in the work process. If someone cannot accept his inner Rebel and prefers the more Conservative aspect of his personality, it is likely that he will find it difficult to tolerate the Rebel in others. This is in line with what Leonard and Straus say can cause the breakdown of a creative process (1997). Before moving on to further investigate diversity in creative teamwork, it is helpful to look at the configuration of the polarities in the personality through the lenses of the Psychology of Selves (Stone and Stone, 1989) – how they are organized, and how they come into play in relationships.

4. Psychological Building Blocks

According to Stone and Stone (1989, 2012), we are not just one self, but made up of many selves. The selves are organized in pairs of opposites; on one side there is the primary selves, and equal and opposite are the disowned or undeveloped selves. *"Primary selves are the selves that we identify with and that define who we are, how we think, and how we behave in our lives. They are also the way we define ourselves to the world. The disowned selves are the selves that are pushed down or repressed by the primary system"* (Stone and Stone, 2012, p. 1).

The primary selves are developed as we grow up as a way of protecting our vulnerability and enabling us to 'make it' in the world. They depend on many things, for instance the culture that we grow up in, our family system, position in

the family, school life etc. The problem is that most of us think of the primary selves as who we are, and do not have access to what the other side, the disowned selves, might bring us. With Csikszentmihalyi's findings in mind, this might be exactly why so many of us get stuck at different points in the creative process. Some design students are excellent ideators, whereas evaluation and selection is much more difficult for them. Some students just build, but lack visions, whereas others think up visionary concepts, but somehow do not get around to realizing them (Friis, 2012).

Stone and Stone have developed an approach called The Voice Dialogue Method, enabling individuals to see and explore the primary and disowned parts operating inside them. If we are identified to the 100th degree with a primary self, like in the earlier example the 'Conservative', we don't have access to the disowned self, the 'Rebel'. The idea is to be able to separate from the Conservative long enough to also see and get access to the other side, not to let go of the Conservative, but to be able to navigate between the two and have a choice in the matter. This is exactly what Csikszentmihalyi (1996) suggests when he says that creative competency involves "[...] the ability to move from one extreme to the other as the situation requires" (p. 57).

5. The Selves in Relationships

What happens if we transfer the idea of the psychological building blocks from the individual person to the context of a group? How do the selves interact at a relational level? We each have our individual configuration of selves (Stone and Stone, 1989, 2012). Since many of us are oblivious to their existence, the selves can interact with other people's selves without our knowledge. We do, however, experience the result of it: If a hardworking and ambitious person finds himself in a team with someone who loves to have a good time and does not worry too much about the work, he can go two ways: He can be incredibly annoyed by the person's lack of diligence, responsibility etc., or he can be swept away by the free spirit, the laughter and good fun.

As the example illustrates, the selves interact with other selves through an 'attract' and 'repel' dynamic: When we meet someone carrying a self which we have disowned we either feel attracted to or repelled by that person (Stone and Stone, 1989).

Under our noses, the selves are attracted and repelled in a myriad of ways, and likely change and unfold as we spend more time together. As a consequence, diversity in teams also means trouble, because it is likely that our selves at some point will be repelled by other team members' selves. This can either lead to an open conflict or to some of the selves going underground to prevent a conflict, which I will refer to as a 'nonflict'.

6. Vulnerability in Creative Teamwork

Conflicts and 'nonflicts' are particularly prone to occur when teams are in a difficult spot in the process, since the primary selves have a tendency to take over when we feel vulnerable. "[...] they [the primary selves] protect the subject's vulnerability, and what they fear will happen if they are not in control. They are the

determining factors of personality, always screening, protecting, observing, and controlling” (Stone and Stone, 1989, p. 88). The primary selves were developed to protect our vulnerability, by being powerful, sensible, pleasing or whatever was required in the context to keep us safe. When we feel threatened or small, they are likely to take over and, if we are not aware of this, will do so without our knowledge. In relationships, when we polarize, we can't contain the opposite. For instance, if someone has a preference for 'perfection', striving to get things 'just right', he cannot endure things, which (to him) appear messy and disorganized. At the point of pressure and vulnerability, he is likely to feel repelled by someone who is more comfortable with chaos and open exploration. This person, in turn, might experience the exact opposite.

Add to this the fact that vulnerability is a frequent ingredient in creative work processes. Creativity is about creating something new of value (Amabile, 1996), and to do so, participants move into uncharted territory. It is complex and for periods of time they are not certain where they are or where they are heading. To most people, this is scary, making them feel vulnerable (Friis, 2012; Mauzy and Harriman, 2002). It is thus unlikely that teams will get through a creative process without experiencing some polarization leading to conflicts and 'nonflicts'.

However, vulnerability can be used as an entrance point to see what selves in us are active, to bring out the polarities at play (Friis, 2012). To do this in a team, the participants must trust each other and the facilitator.

7. The Case

7.1 The Context

For four weeks in the fall of 2012, 37 design students from the Kolding School of Design, Denmark and 44 art students from the Department of Painting and Sculpture at KNUST University, Ghana worked in small teams to identify and solve problems in relation to waste and the environment in Kumasi, Ghana. The course objectives were to teach the students creative problem solving™, design research methods, and collaboration skills.

According to Mathieu and Rapp (2009) devoting time at the outset of a project to create a foundation for the 'teamwork' and the 'task work' leads to better team performance: *“Many teams jump directly into task performance without taking time to address how they are going to manage their team work and task work activities”* (p. 90). In the present course, the danger of moving directly into task performance was addressed through a 'slow start'. The new Ghanaian-Danish student teams spent the first week building relationships, identifying competencies, perspectives and values, creating shared guidelines, and designing the process for the project at hand. To help them create a shared process language, the students used the DSKD Method Cards (figure 1), which is a physical deck of 62 cards, covering methods for initiating collaboration, collecting and analyzing information, and generating, evaluating, and building ideas (Friis & Gelting, 2011).

Throughout the course, the teaching was experience-based: Short introductions gave way to students trying out approaches in practice supported by Danish and Ghanaian teachers, who were available for supervision.



Fig. 1. DSKD Method Cards, Friis & Gelting, 2011

7.2 The Case

Anne, Barnaby, Osborn, and Rose*, two design and two art students, are working together on a four-week creative problem-solving project. When Anne approaches me in the hallway asking for supervision, they are stuck, they are disagreeing, and do not know how to move forward. They have had 14 days of what they think of as 'successful' collaboration, working on identifying challenges and opportunities in relation to waste and the environment in the city of Kumasi, Ghana. They have collected a wide range of information about the situation, pushing the project forward. Suddenly, the joy and positivity is gone. When I meet the team, they seem dispirited and their eyes are mostly downcast except when they are talking to me.

Sitting down at the table with the four students, I ask them to give me a brief description of what the conflict is about. They explain that when they started out yesterday, Anne suggested that they use the method 'Challenge Mapping'. She says: *"They didn't understand what I was talking about. Suddenly, I felt like the misunderstanding covered everything, not just the method, and it became personal. Rose was crying and I became sad to have made her sad. Then the Ghanaians were sad. Everyone was sad"* (Anne, June 2013).

I suggest that we ask the question: 'What are the competencies around the table?' I suggest they start with one person and point out that person's competencies in relation to the process: What characterizes his/her contribution? What is he/she really good at? They begin with Barnaby and everyone contributes, Barnaby too. After talking about his competencies, we move on to the next person. For instance,

* The names of the students have been changed to preserve their anonymity

Barnaby is 'thorough' and a real 'researcher', Osborn is 'playful' and brings 'humor' into the group, Anne is 'structured' and 'well informed' about the project. Rose has a 'supportive energy', 'pushing the project forward'. On a piece of paper, I draw the table and write down the competencies and characteristics in accordance with the student's position in order to make a shared visualization.

The exercise raises the energy level in the group substantially. I then return to the present problem and initiate a session where the participants get to express how they feel and what they have experienced, without the others replying straight away. Anne starts out by expressing her frustration that Barnaby slowed down the process, when she felt the pressure of time and the need to speed up. He then explains his positive intention of making deliberate choices at a crucial moment. He wanted to go over the existing material and get an overview. *"I thought we had come far and had done quite well as a group, so we should relax and analyze our work so far so we don't rush to make any decisions as we seek a way forward"* (Barnaby, June 2013). They all contemplate this statement, Anne realizing that maybe her idea of how to move forward is not the only one.

Suddenly Rose turns to her, crying: 'I have been trying to support you and do the best I can, but obviously I am not good enough for you. I can't be myself in this group! I am so sick of trying to live up to the structured way that you work'. I ask her what part of her is not in the teamwork. She says that she really does not like group work. She likes to do things by herself. Being in the group all the time is wearing her down and she wants to do something completely different. The tone of voice and her posture carries the energy of a rebel. She is agitated and in a state of uproar. I ask her if she knows the rebel energy. She suddenly smiles, and says 'yes! I guess so!' I ask her if she is able to bring that part into the group work – and she says 'no!' We then talk about how that is a loss to the group, not just to her. At some point Anne begins to cry and says 'I am sorry! I have forced my structure and need to fast-forward upon all of you!' There seems to be a general agreement that this is what happened; however, they don't see it as her fault alone or blame her. The others have let her take control. They too have a responsibility in the matter. And when I ask around if there are any bad feelings, there are not. There is a surge of release in the group: forgiveness and what appears to be the ability to see each other in a new light.

I sum up what has taken place, and ask if they feel comfortable moving on by themselves. The answer is a clear 'yes!' Later in the day, Anne tells me there has been a huge shift of energy in the team. Barnaby explains: *"After the discussion [...] we went to the roof of the building to 'cool' off a little. We continued apologizing to each other and thinking about a way forward. Anne then brought the idea that we 'let go' [...]"*. *"She said if it was okay with us, she would suggest we have a pool day the next day at the hotel where they are staying"* (Barnaby, June 2013).

The next day, I ask them how things went. They tell me that the pool day was great: *"[...] it was great to see us all 'family' again"* (Barnaby, June 2013). Anne explains: *"When we were doing the 'competencies around the table', I realized that I had stepped forward too much. I got the idea that maybe I could step back, and still take the lead. During the swimming pool day, I experimented with this and used the method cards, but in a hidden and playful way. And the boys thought it was great and*

came up with some extra spins for the exercises and Rose and I did too. It was amazing; we were laughing and goofing, and we got so much done in no time” (Anne, June 2013). The team is surprised to experience how new insights around the project came to them. They now know where to put their focus and how to move forward (Fig.2).

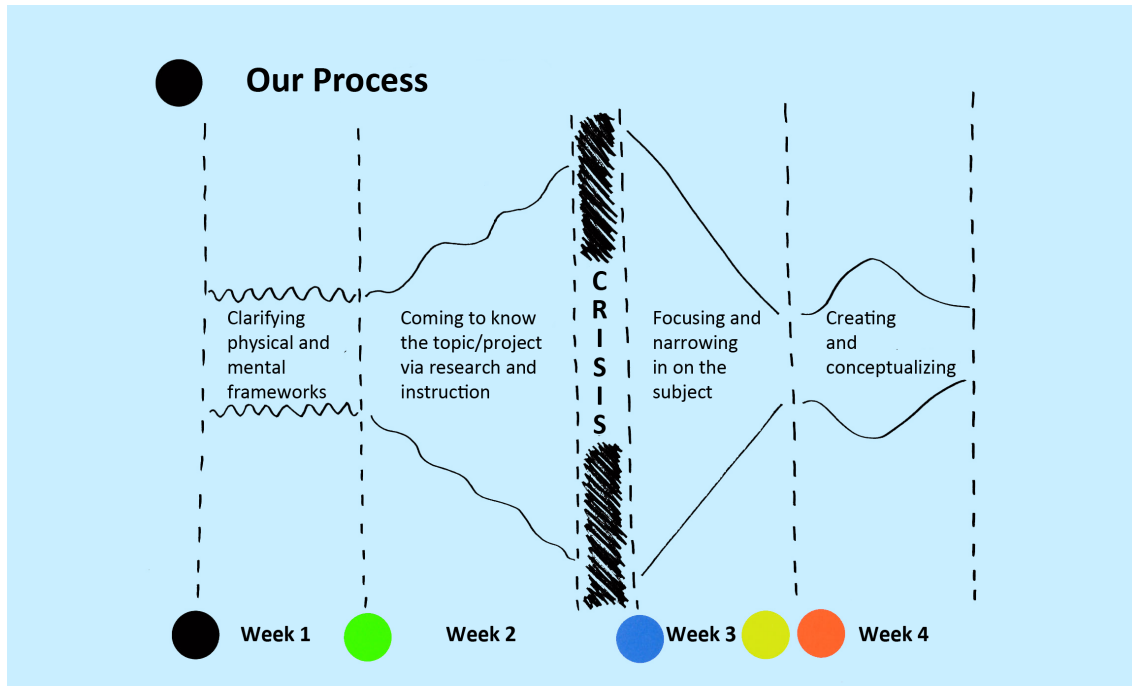


Fig. 2. Students’ process illustration: The conflict and the session are depicted as a black barrier and named ‘the crisis’. The powerful illustration indicates the students’ perception of the event as an important part of the process. The positive progression of weeks 3 and 4 follows the solution to the crisis where the facilitator acted first as an observer of the conflict, then took on the role of a facilitator guiding the group to a collective solution to the crisis. Evaluation Report, November 2012.

The challenge they want to address is: “How might we change people’s mindset towards waste in Ghana?” and they have decided to work with comic strips, which is a format where they can all contribute, for instance Osborn’s and Rose’s sense of humor and sketching abilities. Grinning and smiling at each other, the team seems to have been able to handle the conflict in a constructive way.

Five weeks later, in Denmark, Rose, who initially did not appreciate group work and preferred to do things on her own, has changed her mind. Smiling, she says ‘group work actually has its advantages’ (Rose, November 2012).

8. Analysis and Discussion

In the following, the present approach is compared to Leonard and Straus’ suggestions for how to manage ‘creative abrasion’ (1997), and questions are addressed in relation to the nature of the conflict; the facilitation itself; the role of the facilitator, and ways in which ‘transformation’ happened.

8.1 Including Diversity at the Point of Conflict

Based on the notion that people have cognitive differences and that the ‘creative abrasion’ between differences needs nurturing, Leonard and Straus (1997) suggest

that managers of creative teams start by getting to know themselves, identifying their own thinking styles, and learn to tailor their communication to other thinking styles. In addition, managers must: “[...] spend time from the outset getting members to acknowledge their differences – often through joint exploration of the results of a diagnostic analysis – and devise guidelines for working together before attempting to act on the problem at hand” (Leonard and Straus, 1997, p. 119). This is similar to the approach in the present program, where the students spent time at the outset identifying personal preferences, differences and similarities in the team, creating guidelines etc. However, while Leonard and Straus adhere to general type indicators such as the MBTI, running the risk of placing participants in predetermined ‘boxes’, the present study provides an approach for how to actively bring out the differences, which are at the forefront at that very point. Diversity changes over time. When people get to know one another, new aspects of their personalities surface.

The present approach enables participants to see and describe in their own words the differences at play, which is an important first step to actively leverage the diversity (Justesen, 2008). In addition, the present approach supports exploration at a point where differences are likely experienced as an obstacle to the work at hand. Anne and Rose say: *“With this session, we managed to break down stereotypes, the preconceived roles that we might have given each other, and created a fertile ground for the continued work, where everyone felt accepted. This brought us together as a team and removed the barriers between us. We learned to make use of the group diversity and face it rather than being unaware of it – or afraid of it and trying to work around it* (Evaluation report, November 2012).

8.2 Identifying the Type of Conflict

The conflict occurred at a point where many other teams expressed fatigue and frustration, but only some of them turned into personal conflicts as in the present case, where the members carried strong feelings of sadness and disappointment. Linda Putnam identifies three types of conflict: substantive, affective, and procedural, where the substantive one is task-related, the affective type is related to relationships or personalities, and the procedural kind of conflict has to do with structure and methods (Putnam in Darsø, 2001). The approaches described in the present case relate to the second type of conflict, the affective one, where the disagreement is personal. If used in relation to substantive or procedural conflicts the approach is likely to appear too personal and inappropriate.

But why do conflicts occur in the first place? Stone and Stone point to conflicts arising due to projections. The selves of team members interact with each other and can be repelled or hurt, usually when under pressure, when they are tired or otherwise vulnerable (Stone and Stone, 1989). The causes leading to interpersonal conflict could be the language barrier, different attitudes towards hierarchy, or different norms for communicating and decision-making as pointed out by Brett, Behfar, and Kern (2006). The causes are likely to come up during the facilitation, particularly in the initial investigation and in the clearing session, where participants express individual experiences. However, it is the type of conflict that determines if the present approach is suitable.

8.3 The Role of the Facilitator

In the present case, the objective is to help the team overcome the conflict by opening up and exploring the different parts at play. What is demanded of a facilitator? How might the facilitator build the trust and respect necessary to intervene and support the resolution of the conflict? And how might the facilitator ensure that ownership is present in the group, thus not 'taking over' the process from the group?

According to Basadur (2004) the ability to appreciate different ways of understanding things and using such understanding is especially important in leading interdisciplinary teams. He suggests that the leader must know how to get participants to appreciate the different perspectives around the table. Turning to the Psychology of Selves, this would involve a facilitator who is able to give space to the different selves speaking without judging them: "*We as facilitators must be aware of the fact that similar parts in ourselves will be touched upon during a session. Sometimes we embrace those parts and recognize them, but at other times they are our own 'disowned' parts. We must be very aware of this, otherwise transference will take place.*" (Halbertsma and Stamboliev, 2002). For instance, if the facilitator favors implementation and getting the job done fast, he might get irritated by a person on the team, who prefers to investigate the situation thoroughly before moving ahead. It is important for the outcome of the session that the facilitator notices this discomfort within himself and is aware of the problem. Otherwise a polarization between the team member and the facilitator is likely to occur, leading to the loss of trust.

A pivotal point in the facilitation of student teams is to act as a coach or process leader, not as a teacher: "*Transferring ownership of critical challenges means managers must learn to interact with others as process leader or coach*" (Basadur, 2004, p. 111). Basadur explains that the role of the process leader is to help everyone work together towards a useful solution, which includes a shift from content to process, and refraining from giving orders of any kind. In a teacher-student relationship this would imply an approach that favors asking questions over telling the students what to do, empowering the students to find answers for themselves.

8.4 Transformation

Different fields have several, not always related definitions of transformation. Some define transformation as 'ongoing' change, others as profound changes in practices. The Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary defines 'transformation' as "*changing the shape, appearance, quality or nature of something*" (1984). In the following, transformation is investigated as change at three levels: the individual, the team, and the project level.

8.4.1 Individual Transformation

In the present case the four team members express and listen to the diversity around the table: the competencies, viewpoints and experiences. They see new aspects of their own and the other team members' personalities. In the process Anne discovers there is an alternative to open leadership, which she refers to as hidden leadership, and she realizes that structure and hard work are not the only

options. She can introduce methods and exercises in a humorous way and sometimes do better by playing. *“If I had continued to drive things so hard, I am not sure we would have reached the same results”* (Anne, June 2013).

Eight months later, Anne continues to build on her experiences from the session: *“I really didn’t want to be a leader, and didn’t see myself as such. However, it’s become much more okay for me to take that role, even though I don’t always feel like I am in control and know what to do. But I have realized that others look to me and think I do – which leads me to think, they are probably right. Even though I don’t feel in control, I am, and I am able to let the process do what it needs to do”* and *“I am not so afraid of conflicts anymore. I’ve just experienced another conflict in a group work. I used the experience in Ghana to step back and try to figure out ‘what are the competencies that we each carry?’ to be able to consciously bring them into play”* (Anne, June 2013).

Rose has discovered that teamwork actually has its advantages, and to this day works closely with Anne, even on individual projects. Barnaby has gained the insight that everyone in a team is important: *“[...] I learned how to work with the individual qualities in a team. Nobody is too dumb (as in not having anything to contribute to the team) and nobody is too smart (as in knowing everything and other people’s ideas don’t matter)”* (Barnaby, June 2013). The quotes indicate that through the constructive use of diversity the team members have gained new insights about themselves, which has led to a change in their practice: Barnaby, Rose, and Anne now have more choices available to them. For instance, Rose can work alone *and* together with others, Anne can work hard *and* play, lead in an open *and* hidden way.

8.4.2 Team Transformation

The team requested supervision at a point where they were stuck and frustrated. During the session, the team was able to move from seeing the negative aspects to recognizing the positive qualities as well. Anne explains: *“It’s like peeling off layers. You can be seated and be a team member, but as soon as you have to say what competencies the other people have, you start to peel off layers [...]”*. *“The more things you say, the closer you get to the other persons. In the end it is not just a team member sitting there, it is Barnaby. [...] The process makes it human and you take it with you”* (Anne, June 2013). After the session, the students were able to adopt a new way of working: To ‘let go’. During the following day they worked and played, and ‘became a family again’. They were able to experience differences in the team from a new position, leading to experimenting with their ways of working together. These are indications that significant changes in the relationships had taken place.

8.4.3 Project Transformation

In the present case, the team works in a creative problem solving™ process. At the point of conflict they disagree how to identify the challenge. According to Anne: *“I suggested that we work with challenge mapping. I think the example on the card is that you move from house to door, to handle and so forth. But the boys wanted to start all the way out, including the whole world. It was like starting over. I said it was no use, we didn’t have time and it wasn’t relevant”* (Anne, June 2013). However,

during the workday at the pool, the team was able to generate and formulate a challenge, thus setting a clear direction for the project. In addition, they came up with a solution format – the comic strip – addressing the challenge *and* including everyone’s competencies. It appears that the ability to bring out and appreciate the diversity in the team enabled profound change in the project: From being stuck to having new directions and opportunities available.

9. Facilitation Guideline

Below is a preliminary guideline for the facilitator, providing the basic principles of the presented approach.

9.1 Preparation

The first step is to get a brief overview of what the conflict is about and identify whether it is of a personal nature or related to the task or the structure only. The facilitator then moves into the role of explorer, an interested and objective observer trying to discover as much as possible about the different selves and perspectives at play around the table. An attitude of acceptance and respect is extremely important as the selves are sensitive to the feelings and judgments of the facilitator and will not respond if they feel disapproved of or manipulated (Stone and Stone, 1995; Halbertsma and Stamboliev, 2002). For the same reason the facilitator cannot be invested in a particular outcome. *“There should be no agenda. Changes will take place, growth will occur, [...] but these cannot be the aims of the facilitator”* (Stone and Stone, 1995, p. 17).

9.2 Identifying the Competencies

The aim of the next step in the session is for participants to experience the different qualities without judging them. The facilitator asks the team members to identify the different competencies and qualities around the table, one person at a time; everyone contributes. The facilitator draws a map and notes down the competencies and qualities of each participant, thus enabling everyone to *see* the differences. In the present case, the team members were able to discern each other’s competencies in a constructive way. If the participants do not formulate each other’s competencies in objective or positive terms, the facilitator asks the person naming the competency to reframe it in a positive manner in order to inculcate the idea that each competency has both positive and negative aspects.

The exercise accomplishes at least three things: a. It brings up the different, often opposite competencies and selves around the table at the time of the conflict. This enables the participants to b. realize that their way of thinking or feeling is not the only way, initiating a separation from their own primary selves (Stone and Stone, 1989, 1995). In addition, c. the participants get a chance to experience the potentials of the team, feeling the power of this ‘full personality’ (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996) that they together represent.

9.3 Clearing

Going back to the project at hand and the situation that prevented the team from proceeding resulting in the dispute, the participants are invited to openly express their perception of the situation and listen carefully to what the others say. They talk to each other, not to the facilitator, but the facilitator guides the conversation,

deciding who speaks and who listens, asking questions along the way, for instance 'how does hearing this make you feel?' or 'why is this a problem for you?'

The facilitator observes the participants, looking for physiological, emotional, and linguistic cues (Stone and Stone, 1995). The attitude is that of respect and curiosity, enabling an objective clarification of views and perspectives. In the present case this led to a state of greater understanding and sensitivity towards the different feelings, needs, and perspectives. The participants were able to experience the tension of the opposing views without having to alter them, and a new level of choice and opportunity became available.

9.4 Concluding the Session

Stone and Stone (1995) suggest that the facilitator sets aside some time to summarize and reflect on what has happened in the session. During the summary the facilitator can ask the team members to stand next to her, allowing them to revisit and 'see' the different parts and qualities at play. While 'looking' at the session in retrospect, participants might get new insights and realizations (Stone and Stone, 1995). A final round of reflection marks the conclusion of the session.

10. Conclusion

The present article set out to investigate how to facilitate creative teamwork at the point of interpersonal conflict. Conflicts are to be expected when diversity is present, and hence exploring approaches to constructive conflict solving seems to be of great value.

Findings in the present study indicate that bringing the differences out into the open in an appreciative and objective manner, starting with looking for and naming the competencies around the table, and continuing with listening to different experiences, intentions, and perspectives help participants disengage from the polarization and appreciate the diversity which likely led to the conflict in the first place. It appears that participants gain access to a new position of choice, where they are able to see and leverage the opposite 'poles' in the teamwork. In the present case, the facilitation led to transformation in the individual reflection and practice, illustrating the different ways of working together in the team. Hence new choices and opportunities became available in the project. Central to this process appears to be the ability to contain vulnerability, not only at the individual but also at the group level. This requires mutual respect and trust in the relationships, including trust in the facilitator.

The present study is explorative and gives rise to new questions that need further investigation in order to clarify aspects of the presented facilitation approach. For instance, in the present session things appeared to move forward smoothly, but what can be learned from sessions that go wrong? In regard to the competencies of the facilitator, what type of training is required to carry out this work? And what are the short- and long-term benefits to the participants and to the teamwork? The author intends to pursue these and other questions in future studies in order to further qualify the propositions presented here.

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