

Facilitation Skills for Participatory Decision-Making

Evaluation of a Workshop, held at IPGRI headquarters
Rome, February 15-17, 2005

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Summary

The Institutional Learning and Change Initiative and the Knowledge Sharing Project of the ICT-KM Program joined forces from 15-17 February 2005 to offer a course that builds essential skills for facilitating group decision-making among CGIAR managers and team leaders. This report presents summary results of a participant evaluation. The specific objectives were to build skills and knowledge in the following areas:

- Facilitation of meetings in order to make them more effective
- Managing conflict and disagreement
- Building consensus
- Facilitating virtual teams

The general reaction from the participants was very positive. All were pleased with the program and the skills they learned. Many said they learned a tremendous amount and many have already begun to apply it to their professional and personal lives. Furthermore, many went on to train or inform others about what had been learned. Participants felt that it was one of the best workshops they had ever attended, both because of the way it was organized and the quality of learning. Most came away from the workshop with a better understanding of how to facilitate. Among the most useful aspects of the workshop were the practice and feed back sessions.

Introduction

Because CGIAR Centers and Challenge Programs are increasingly required to organize and manage teams and participatory projects to accomplish their goals, there is a need for leaders with excellent facilitation skills. On top of this, there is a growing recognition that international agricultural research must engage many diverse partners to be effective and efficient. Managing diverse and often far-flung teams with members from diverse cultures and backgrounds represents a challenge – one that requires facilitation skills for CGIAR managers and team leaders. The overall objective of this workshop was to contribute to the CGIAR's capacity to facilitate meetings, teams, and group-decision making processes.

CGIAR centers and Challenge Programs were invited to nominate a staff member to attend this workshop, with a resulting 20 people in attendance from 14 CGIAR centers and programmes (see table below).

Dr. Sam Kaner, founder and president of “Community at Work,” leading expert on consensus decision-making and senior author of *The Facilitator’s Guide to Participatory Decision Making*, led the workshop.

Evaluation Methodology

Approximately one month after the workshop was finished, participants were asked to rate various aspects of the workshop through an online survey. A web-based service, called *Survey Monkey*¹, was used to administer a custom-made survey that included 18 questions. Eight of these required a rating and ten were open ended questions allowing an essay response. Seventeen of twenty participants completed the survey, an 85% response rate.

Type of organization	Name
CGIAR Centers	CIAT, ICRAF, ICRISAT, CIFOR, IRRI, IPGRI, IWMI, ILRI
Challenge Programmes or Inter-Center Initiatives	Challenge Program for Water and Food Central Advisory Service on Intellectual Property ICT-KM Programme Gender & Diversity Programme System Wide Livestock Programme
Associated Programmes	Global Crop Diversity Trust

General Reaction

The general reaction to the workshop was very positive. At the end of the workshop, participants were asked to make closing statements on the training. Among them, most stated that they were very satisfied with the skills they learned and hoped to share them with others. One of the comments – “it was the best workshop I’ve ever attended” – reflects how much of an impact this workshop had on participants. Another participant stated that, “I will keep most of the principles fresh by practicing them constantly.” It was also said that this kind of workshop will make a huge difference on how things will run in the CGIAR in the future. Participants were also very pleased with the workshop facilitator, Dr. Kaner. Most felt that he not only taught the skills through lecture and materials, but also demonstrated them throughout the delivery of the course, thus reinforcing the lessons through information, practice and demonstration. Some of the comments of participants are shown below.

“The training workshop was extremely well designed. Extremely efficient interweaving of theory and practice and reflection.”

“It’s not often that you are allowed to practice what you are learning in such an interactive fashion... I hope many others get to attend such training.”

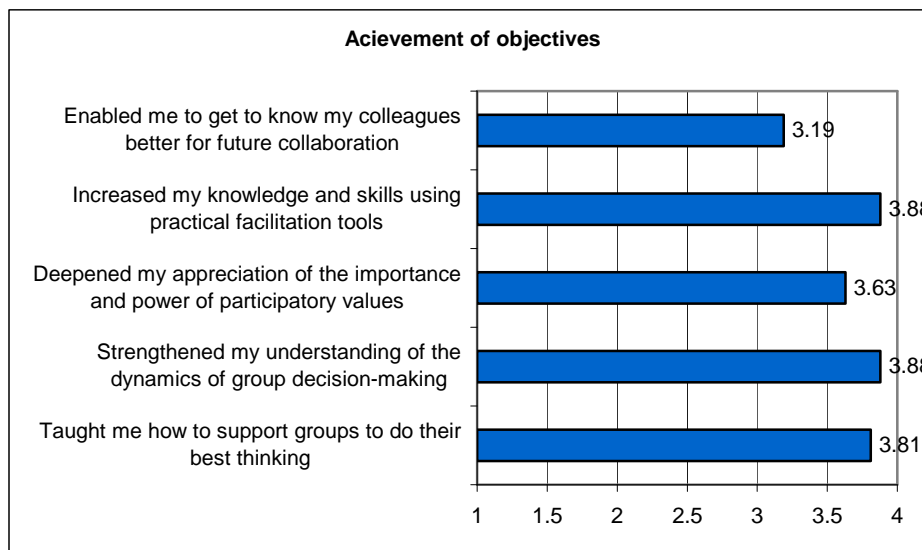
¹ www.surveymonkey.com

"The workshop exceeded my expectations because it went beyond the presentation of tools or techniques and presented these within a broad framework for group work and decision-making. This framework helps me understand and manage these processes much better."

"This was exactly the type of training I was looking for to enhance my capacity as a leader."

The overall purpose of this workshop was to build capacity to facilitate meetings, teams, and group decision-making processes in the CGIAR. (Figure 1). On the whole, participants felt that the training increased their facilitation knowledge and skills, and strengthened their understanding of the dynamics of group decision making, taught them to support groups in their thinking and decision making and deepened their appreciation of the importance and power of participatory values.

Figure 1. Participants' general assessment of the training (average participant scores on a 4-point scale)

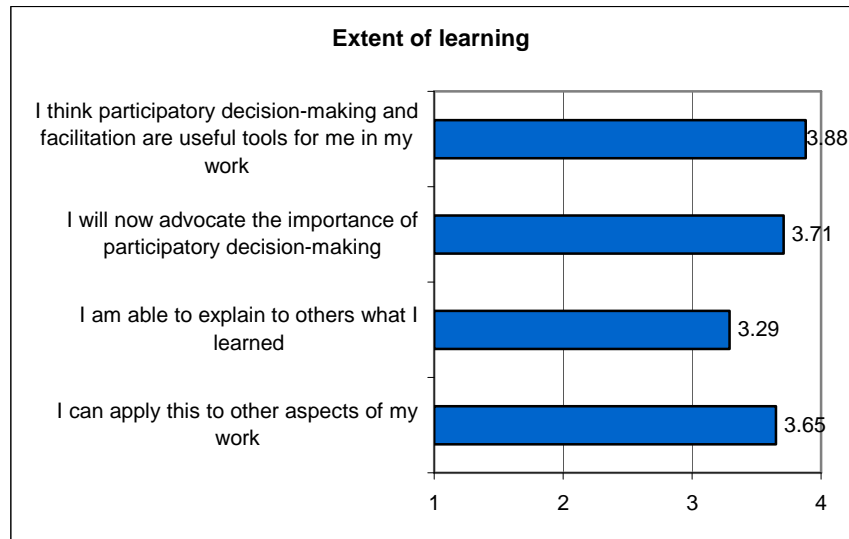


Each participant came with his or her own set of personal objectives. Most said that they now have a better understanding of how to facilitate. However, some participants who hoped to build skills for facilitating virtual teams felt this topic was not adequately addressed.

Extent of Learning

All of the 17 respondents reported that they had learned a great deal from the training and were now able to use participatory decision-making and facilitation tools in their work. Because of their positive experience, they all will now advocate the importance of these skills and can explain to others what they learned (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Extent of learning (participant scores on a 4-point scale with 1 being strongly disagree and 4 being strongly agree)



Respondents reported learning in two major areas. One of these was learning about skills and tools that could be used in facilitation. The second area was learning about the importance of participatory processes for decision making for building commitment and engagement. Many respondents also felt that the training should be offered to others. The training reiterated how important group decision-making is in the CGIAR’s work. Several quotes related to learning are shown below.

“I am newly motivated in these participatory skills and feel ready to use them.”

“I always have been a strong supporter of team work and participatory decision making. However, with this seminar, I now have got a set of tools that will allow me to better get across this principles in a variety of work situations (seminars, planning meetings, etc.).”

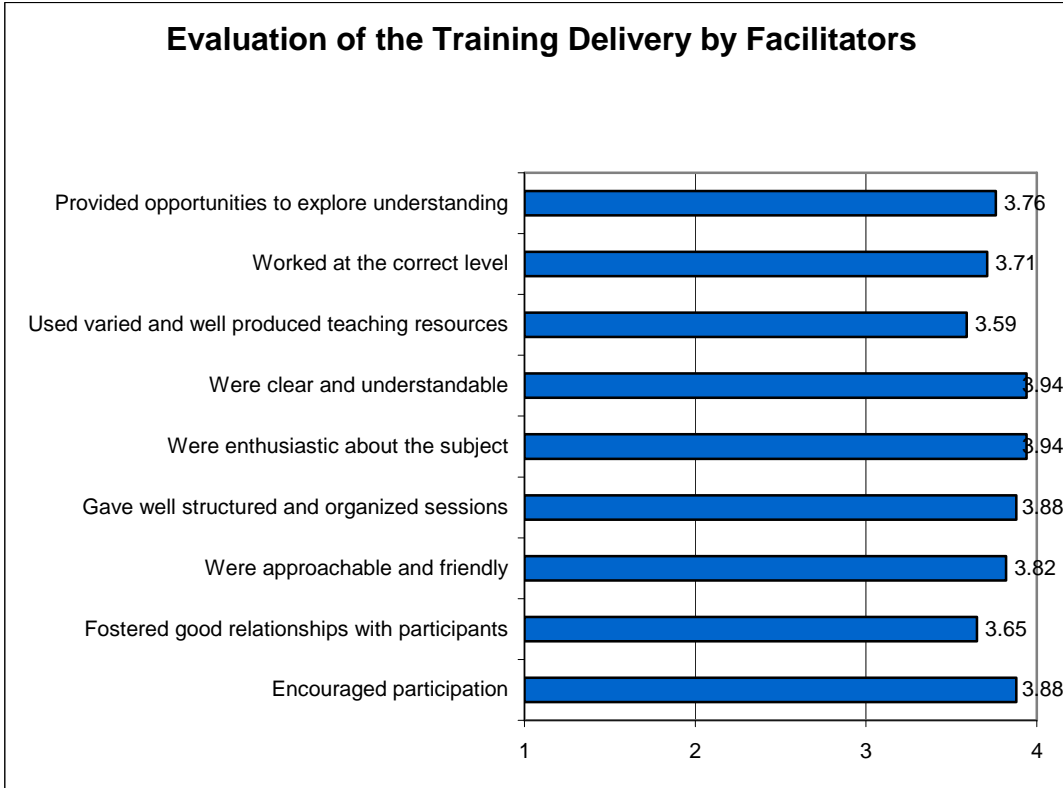
“I find the approach extremely valuable in getting everyone's input and buy-in into key decisions. As far as I am concerned, this approach should be the norm in making high-stakes decisions in organizations that truly value their staff.”

“I have a better understanding of how participatory decisions are stronger than individual decisions. The level of commitment of people who have participated in a decision-making process is higher than that of people who have not.”

Quality of Training Delivery

Participants gave high marks to the facilitators (Dr. Kaner and his assistant, Libby Bacchuber) for the delivery of the training (Figure 5). Virtually every participant agreed that the trainers were clear, easily understood and enthusiastic. Participants appreciated the well-organized sessions and the highly participatory nature of the course.

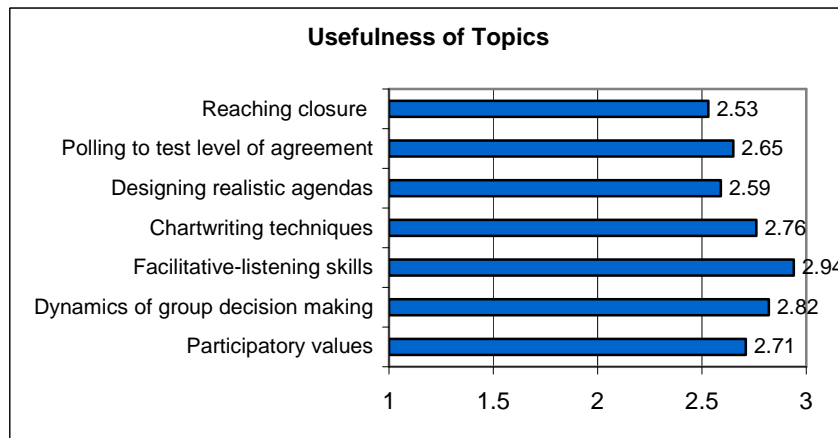
Figure 5. Evaluation of the training delivery by the facilitators (on a 4 point scale with 1 being strongly disagree and 4 being strongly agree)



Main Strengths and Weaknesses

Most participants felt that the topics presented during the workshop were very useful. Of the various topics covered, facilitative listening and group decision making were considered to be the most useful (Figure 6).

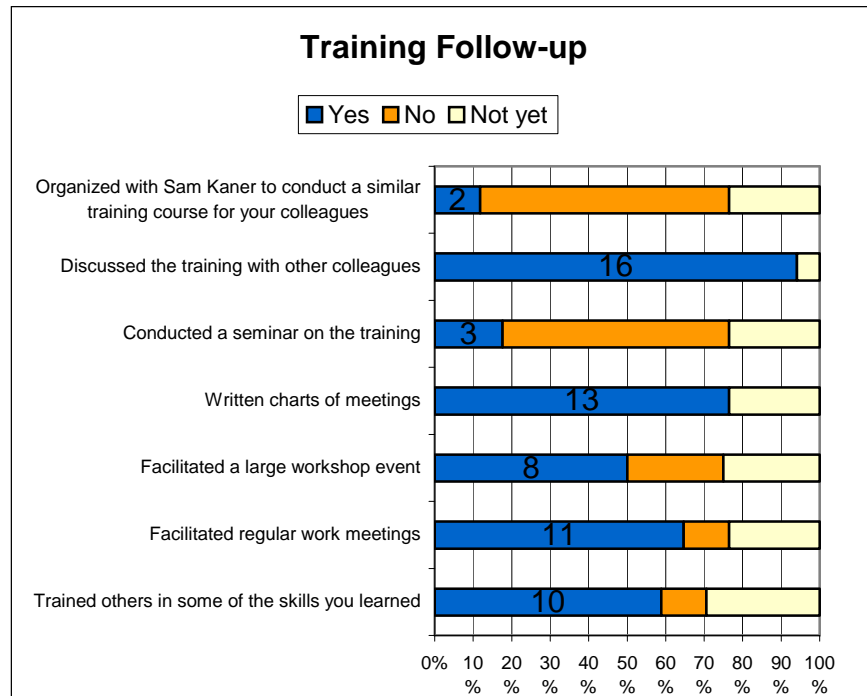
Figure 6. Usefulness of the topics covered (average score on a 3-point scale with 1 being of limited use and 3 being very useful)



Follow-up Actions After the Workshop

Participants were asked if they had used the skills they learned after the workshop. More than 90% of the respondents said they had discussed the training with other colleagues. Three-quarters had utilized chart-writing skills and over 60% had facilitated meetings at work (Figure 4). Three-fifths of the respondents also said they had trained other colleagues in some aspect of facilitation. Two participants reported that they had contracted Dr. Kaner to organize similar training courses at their centers and four said they had plans to do so in the near future.

Figure 4. Training follow-up by participants.



Respondents described several “mini cases” of how they were using skills learned in the workshop:

“Using the techniques I learnt at the course, I facilitated a very important 2-day meeting of CIFOR’s senior management team on strategic staffing. I introduced the ‘gradient of agreement’ which was used throughout the meeting before making decisions. It was a highly productive and satisfactory meeting.”

“Another participant and I recently held a workshop on chartwriting for about 15 colleagues in our center’s Communications Unit. I also supported another participant in undertaking the facilitation of a workshop in connection with a development project in which CIAT is a partner. In addition, I have begun applying the skills and knowledge I acquired in meetings in which I have a significant role. Finally, I have begun exploring with Sam the possibility of

translating his book into Spanish and of building capacity in Latin America to offer facilitation support for events conducted in Spanish.”

“We at IPGRI have conducted two training sessions of about 40 people on chartwriting. Some of these then went directly into planning meetings of their own teams and used their skills. I facilitated a large planning meeting of one of our new programmes. I discussed the training with many people. I practice the skills in my own regular meetings. I have also worked with IPGRI personnel to encourage them to have another training for IPGRI staff using Sam Kaner and our personnel is following up on that. We have high expectations that it will be done, but not a final approval as of today. The ILAC project will sponsor another training with Sam later this year.”

“I discussed my training with several colleagues and I organised two chart-writing workshops. I have facilitated my regular group meetings and a three-day international workshop with 20 participants. I have used charts in all my meetings.”

“We designed a workshop on strategic staffing for our Management Group. This was one of the reasons to attend the workshop. We followed the design principles and documented the staffing agreements. We posted the participatory values as the groundwork for the discussions. In order to support this event, we needed to review the facilitation with another staff member. I have agreed to participate in the Annual planning meeting in Sept. and expect that the meeting will be designed around the principles of participation. On a personal basis, I led the design of a participatory retreat for the International School (where I am on the board).”

“Rather than take a slot during a project planning workshop to present my ideas, I facilitated a go-around to capture the participants' experiences and expectations.”

“I actively participated in the organization of the celebration of the International Womens Day at CIAT. I suggested the group dynamic (group discussions between international and national female staff on various topics), the use of an additional facilitator, and did the previous chartwriting for the workshop. 2. I co-designed the agenda and facilitated the workshop of a project planning meeting involving CIAT and several partners. 3. We will give a small test-workshop for our Unit on ChartWriting, and plan to offer it then to other CIAT staff.”

“Together with my colleagues at ILRI-Nairobi, we conducted a two-hour seminar for a group of 10 colleagues. The basic objective was to share with them some of the exercises on chart-writing, paraphrasing, dynamics of meetings, etc.”

Recommendations for Future Facilitation Training

This course was highly recommended by those who experienced it. When asked if they would recommend more training in facilitation for CGIAR staff and managers, 100% of

the respondents replied affirmatively. Several respondents said that it would be a useful training for a wide variety of staff, with the following specific groups identified as a priority:

- Human resources managers
- Programme directors and theme coordinators
- Those involved in CGIAR reform efforts

Further recommendations include having the training conducted regionally, with offers coming from CIFOR, ICRISAT and ILRI.