

Training Session 9

Brainstorming and Evaluating Options

Purpose:

- To learn the basic guidelines for brainstorming.
- To identify and enhance thinking skills that will improve conflict resolution processes.

Length: 45 minutes

Materials: Flipchart, markers

Procedure:

1. Explain that the fourth and fifth stages of the mediation process have to do with brainstorming possible solutions to the conflict and then evaluating them. In order to practice this stage, we will first learn the rules of brainstorming and then do some creativity exercises.

2. On a flipchart, post the following rules of brainstorming:

- Listen to what others say
- No criticism of ideas is allowed
- Building on other ideas is allowed
- All ideas are accepted
- No justification of ideas is necessary (you don't have to explain your idea or why you think it is a good idea)

3. Explain that after the parties brainstorm ideas for a possible solution, we will help them evaluate the ideas in order to pick the ones that are most suitable and that they both can agree to. When evaluating ideas, it is important to first rule out those that are completely unrealistic, totally impractical, and/or illegal. These can be marked with an X. Ideas that might work or can partially work if slightly changed or modified can be marked with a half check, half x. Ideas that both parties agree to can be marked with a check mark or circled. Again, the parties are responsible for their own agreement and the mediator's role is to facilitate this process by ensuring that the communication between them remains respectful and positive. It may be necessary to go back a stage if the participants begin to fight again over unresolved issues. The mediator should take every opportunity to point out when effective collaboration is happening and to point out where the places of mutual agreement are occurring. When the parties have finished evaluating all of the ideas, they will compile the acceptable solutions and finally turn them into an agreement.

First Activity: (10 minutes)

1. Explain that the goal of this activity is simply to get our creative juices flowing, in other words, the point is to be as inventive as possible.
2. Split participants in to groups of 4 or 5, have each group assign one member as the recorder.
3. Groups are given the name of an object (paperclip, blanket, tent, toothbrush) and asked to write down as many uses for the object as they can brainstorm in two minutes.
4. When the time is up, groups are asked to stop and count the total number of brainstormed uses.
5. Bring the group back together and compare lists. Who came up with the most uses for different objects? What are the most creative uses? How did it feel to let your brain run free?

Was it difficult to think off other uses for objects when we are used to thinking of them in a certain way?

Second Activity: (10 minutes)

1. Distribute the "Nine Dots" handout to participants (they will need a hard surface for this exercise).
2. Direct participants to place the point of their pen on any dot and then attempt to connect all of the dots, using no more than four straight lines and without picking the pen up from the paper.
3. After a few minutes, invite someone who has discovered a way to accomplish the task to come forward and demonstrate the solution on chart paper. If no one has discovered a solution, invite participants to form partnerships to work on a solution together for a few minutes.
4. If no one discovers a solution, illustrate the answer.
5. Go over the exercise with the group, using the following process questions to enrich the discussion:
 - If you had difficulty discovering the answer, what were the barriers that limited your exploration?
 - If you discovered the answer, what thinking steps did you follow?
 - How did you feel if others discovered a solution before you did?
 - What does this exercise have to do with conflict resolution? (This exercise is a common way to illustrate linear thinking. It tests participants' ability to use lateral thinking to find a solution.)

Third Activity: (30 minutes)

1. Explain that we are going to practice the fourth and fifth stages of mediation by brainstorming solutions to a conflict and then evaluating the options. Explain that it can be helpful for the parties to the conflict to write down their proposed solutions on a whiteboard/chalkboard or pad of paper. (Ask the participants if they can think of reasons why this would be beneficial? – elicit that this is important because the two parties are collaborating or working together on solutions). The mediator's role is to explain how a brainstorm works (go over the rules of the brainstorm) and to tell the parties that they are going to have a chance now to think of different ways to possibly resolve their conflict, and then to observe while parties come up with their own solutions to the problem. Mediators should only intervene if absolutely necessary (*This is something to discuss with the participants – most mediators believe that in order for the solution to fully belong to the parties, they must be the ones to come up with the suggestions, but sometimes it is helpful for peer-mediators to add their two cents. The participants can decide what is right for them*).
2. Split the participants into groups of 4. Ask the participants to decide who the mediators are and who the parties to the conflict are (if there are 5 people in a group, one can be an observer).
3. Give each group a conflict scenario to work with, a pad of paper and markers/writing utensils.
4. Let the participants come up with various solutions for about *10 minutes*.
5. Prompt the mediators to help the parties transition to evaluating the solutions that they have come up with. Remind them to use agreed upon symbols to evaluate solutions (x, check-x, and check or circle). When the parties have finished evaluating their solutions, congratulate them for doing such a great job! (*10 minutes*)
6. Bring the group back together to process the activity. (*10 minutes*)

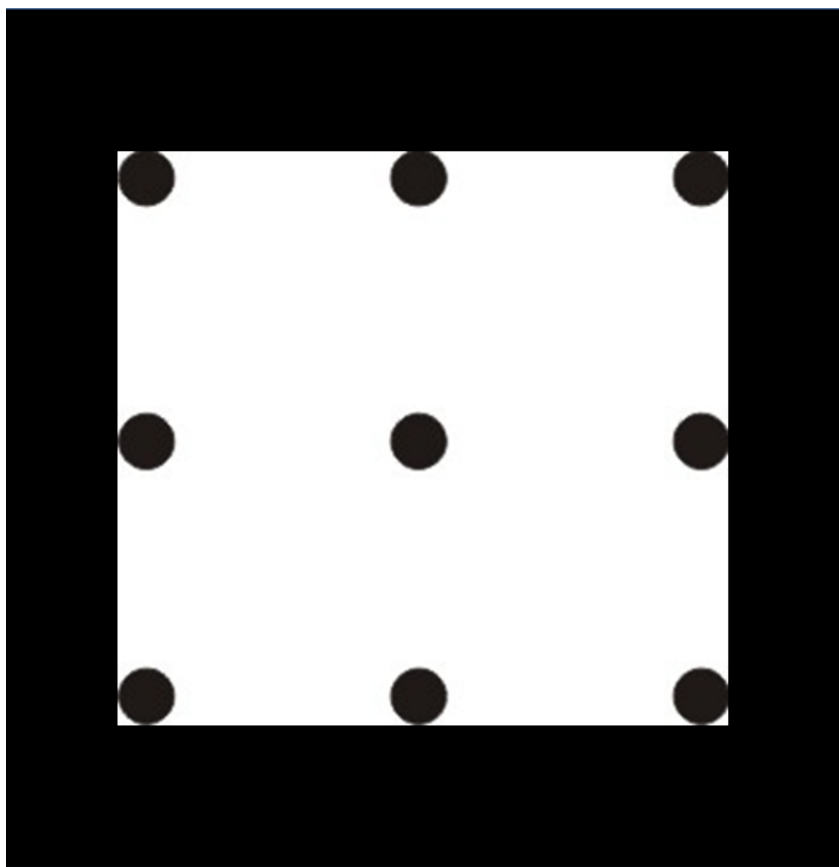
Discussion Questions:

- How did it go?
- What was easy/difficult about this stage of the mediation process for you (as mediators/as parties)
- Do you think that the mediators should suggest solutions, or do you think that the parties themselves should be the ones to come up with possible solutions for the conflict? Why or why not?

Handout

Nine Dots

Instructions: Place the point of your pen on any dot and attempt to connect all of the dots using no more than four straight lines and without picking the pen up from the paper.



Handout

“Miracle” Questions:

Questions to encourage parties during the brainstorming stage:

- “What will happen if you don’t solve this problem?”
- “How many ways can you think of to solve this problem?”
- “And you?”
- “Wow! You’ve thought of many ways to resolve your problem. Which ones would be the best solutions for now?”

- "What might happen if you choose A?"
- "How about B?"
- "Do you think C would work?"

Use these questions when you think that the disputants are not moving toward a solution.

- What will happen if you don't solve the problem?
- Can you restate what he/she just said?
- Did you know how he/she felt?
- Does knowing this make some difference to you?
- How many possible solutions can you come up with?

