

THE DILEMMAS OF CONDUCTING SAME-SEX NEGOTIATION TRAINING

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ABSTRACT

Having an understanding of how gender differences impact the processes and outcomes of negotiations is recognised as an important management issue. This paper explores the dilemmas and issues that need to be considered when conducting same-sex training workshops for women that focus on negotiation skills development that highlight gender relations and gender differences.

While women and men are interested in the impact of their gender in negotiations and both sexes get confirmation of these issues in same sex discussions, in reality they may learn best from their experience when both sexes are present. This paper reviews this and other dilemmas and issues that need to be addressed when conducting gender relations and negotiation training.

INTRODUCTION

The workshops central to this paper, are also part of the focus of a broader PhD research program being conducted by the author that explores how women and men engaged in negotiations are influenced by their organisational and cultural context. It investigates areas of gender difference and gender relations and how they impact the 'success' that men and women have in the workplace. The researcher also explores the perceptions of women involved in workshops that are conducted by the researcher. The experience of conducting these workshops is the subject of this paper.

The two day workshops focused on raising awareness of gender differences that occur in negotiations. The workshop was designed as a skills development and awareness raising program to assist professional working women to be more successful in their workplace environments (male dominated).

The rationale for using a same-sex training strategy to conduct these workshops was two fold. Firstly, to ensure a safe environment without the complication of dominating behaviours from males. Secondly, due to the standard practice of targeting women only participants when providing gender relations training.

The paper outlines five of the dilemmas associated with the research methodology of gathering data from a same-sex group (of women). It links the literature with data received from the women participants in these workshops. Lastly, this paper identifies some of the implications for future training and for organisations seeking to address or implement cultural change targeting gender equality.

METHODOLOGY

The primary question for this paper is; What dilemmas need to be addressed when conducting same-sex negotiation skills training workshops that focus on gender relations and gender difference?

This paper uses established tools as part of the process of conducting these training workshops; pre-course questionnaires, evaluation questionnaires as well as anecdotal data was collected from workshop participants who attended four separate gender relations and negotiation workshops ran during 2004.

The data collected was used as a basis for the facilitator (and researcher) to consider major issues and constraints in the design and development of this program as well as some of the central methodological issues when researching gender differences in negotiations training.

The participants involved in the four two-day workshops were from a mix of organisational settings, private and public sector organisations and a range of industry sectors (mining, manufacturing, communications, finance, professional services and health). Participants were largely from middle to senior management positions and a mix of professional areas.

The following dilemmas were identified by the researcher (and facilitator) of these same-sex negotiation and gender differences workshops: stereotyping,; generalizing and generational differences; the need for men to be involved in the training; the need to incorporate the wholistic perspective to sex differences and gender inequality into the workshop content; the need to manage emotional reactions such as rejection, resistance and projection; Personal gender-politics; and, the organisational responsibility for change. Five of these dilemmas are outlined below with a view to discovering how future training can be improved to meet the workshops' overall objectives of increasing gender equity in organisations and empowering individual women to be more effective negotiators in the workplace.

1. A number of the participants engaged in this training were concerned about using stereotypes to explore gender differences, believing that the highlighting of stereotypes tends to perpetuate such thinking and the problems they might bring to gender relations. The reality is we can't escape stereotypes. They're inherent when identifying gender issues. Cornelius (1998, [1]) explains that unconsciously or consciously, we will often mould our own behaviour to fit our version of an accepted version of an accepted sex-role stereotype. Bailey (1993 [2]) explains that stereotypes are passed from generation to generation buried under numerous layers of justifications and reinforcement. The issue is further complicated by the fact that stereotyped individuals often subscribe to the stereotypes about themselves (Bailey, 1993[2]). It may be important, however, for the workshop facilitator to clearly identify their intent when exploring stereotypes.

2. Many of the workshop participants reacted to any generalisations being made in the workshop, pointing out individual differences and situational contexts impact gender relations as do generational differences in perceptions, expectations and experiences around gender difference. Many argued the younger generation don't experience gender inequality or gender differences.

Hundreds of studies conducted on gender and negotiation have found that in negotiation, gender is dynamic and interactive –its significance and expression varies under different conditions and in different situations (Rubin and Brown,1975 [3], Watson, 1994 [4]; Menkel-Meadow, 2000, [5]). The facilitator might therefore best acknowledge that while generalisations must sometimes be made when exploring gender relations, this should be balanced with identifying the generational and situational differences that impact on them.

3. Several workshop participants strongly suggested that in order to change the organisational culture regarding gender relations and gender inequities you need to train the men as well as women. Perhaps even more so! Bailey (1993,[2]) supports this argument stating that only a restructuring of the socialization through the education of all parties to the stereotype will lead to erosion and eventually successful release from the constraints imposed by this process. For true equality to be realised in the workplace, both men and women need to move beyond traditional role concepts and stereotyping. This

presents a strong case to conduct mixed-sex rather than same-sex training in gender relations and negotiations.

4. There were a number of unexpected emotional reactions felt from participants to the gender issues raised in the workshop. Cornelius (1998,[1]) suggests our reaction to a person or situation gives us a clue to our own projected issue. When strong emotions stir us, chances are that the unconscious is at work. For example, various reactions appeared to surface for women attending these gender relations focused training programs including fear, denial, anger or resistance (to accepting that gender differences even exist). It seems clear there is a need to manage such reactions and understand the role that personality, self-concept, self-perceptions and expectations play for an individual engaged in the training.

5. Personal gender-politics, that is, how people relate individually to gender issues appeared to impact many women participants in this training. One example of personal gender-politics was displayed in the use of, "I am not a feminist, but - ", followed by a feminist observation or conclusion. Several participants as well as the workshop facilitator made such statements. Magnusson, (2000,[6]) suggests that such positioning, allows women to avoid any rubbing off of social contagion from "feminists". The workshop facilitator needs to develop an awareness of such gender-politics, especially their own personal gender-politics and when possible share such consciousness with others in the training context.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper identified five major dilemmas in conducting same-sex negotiation training. These dilemmas are indicative of the myriad of factors that influence the experience of workshop participants involved in a subject area as complex and contradictory as gender relations and gender differences in negotiations.

These insights into such complexity can guide the workshop facilitator and researcher when considering the future design and delivery of gender and negotiations training. For example, it may be important to offer mixed-sex workshops in addition to same-sex programs. It will be important for the workshop designer and facilitator to be considerate of these factors, especially the use of stereotyping, generalisations, projections or personal gender-politics.

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