Syria, a Bloody Mess

Creating and facilitating a dialogue on a topic such as war is no easy task. Such topics are so broad, and the time allowed may not allow for proper closure. The group facilitating chose to use a case study on the war in Syria. This was wise choice; it kept the participants focused, and gave us insight into how the war unfolded, as well as how it escalated. The facilitators were well informed and tried to insure that participation was balanced as well.

We were given background information through hand out sheets, and as well as the facilitators speaking about some of their research. The information was extremely helpful in helping us to map the conflict. We know the triggering event, who the players are, and what happens to countries such as Syria due to war.

One of the formats used to initiate dialogue was a conflict spectrum. Within the spectrum participants are asked to take positions on a question posed. In this scenario we were asked to stand with others who were either for war, against war, or undecided. I decided to stand with those who believed that war is necessary, even though this is contrary to my beliefs. We were asked to stand against the wall at the location that represented our position. Two observations that I made were that I was uncomfortable standing against a wall. It reminds me of a Police line-up, or worse a firing squad. The other observation I made was that I took an opposite position in an effort to increase the likelihood of good dialogue, however at the end of the spectrum I found myself with the undecideds. This tells me I am learning not to come to conclusions as quickly as I had before, and not to take positions till the “jury is out”. A couple of suggestions in using the spectrum in dialogue are’ “invite individuals to talk about why they chose the spot they are standing on, or invite people to call out from where they are standing and talk to the whole group” (49). [[1]](#footnote-2)

One of the group’s most effective means of creating dialogue came from another handout in which a scenario that was of national security was described. The groups were asked to read the information and to pick a plan of action, and to describe the advantages and disadvantages of this strategy. There was a lot of back and forth in the group I participated in. It was balanced and each member had strong opinions on why our strategy was the best way toward resolution of the incident.

We were also privy to a process which I can only describe as throwing snow balls. We were all asked to write a question pertaining to the topic (war), and to crumble it up and throw it like a snowball at another group member. This took place within a circle, this gave a more intimate feeling to the exercise. We all gave our personal insights to the questions contained in the “snowballs”, A personal insight gained from this exercise was that I don’t need to blurt out the first thing that comes to mind. I chose to do my breathing exercises, which allowed me to contemplate on the question and offer my true perspective, rather than just trying to sound good.

Some other insights gained from the dialogue came from our professor’s. One suggestion was that “silence is about listening”. I was able to relate to this since i have facilitated many times, however never became comfortable with silence. In the past I would try to fill the gaps with humor or trying to force the conversation. I will be mindful of this in the future. Topics such as war can be quite emotional, it is important to give people time to process what they've seen and heard, this might require silence. This is part of the process. Another critique was that the video that the facilitators used might have been more effective at the beginning of the dialogue, rather than as a “rap-up” of the meeting. I tend to agree, I felt that a samoan circle or a similar format can actually help people gain closure on the topic, or to at least give insight into what they've taken away from the dialogue. Overall I think this group was well prepared and facilitated an excellent dialogue.

Works Referenced

49, Kraybill, R., & Wright, E. (2006). The little book of cool tools for hot topics: Group tools to facilitate meetings when things are hot. Intercourse, PA: Good Books.

1. See Kraybill and Wright 49, The Little Book of Cool Tools for Hot Topics. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)