

A Novice Facilitator

Joaquina Rodríguez, 2025

It was around 1979 at the Human Development Project Sol de Septiembre, in Chile, led by the Institute of Cultural Affairs volunteer team and the facilitators and leaders of the community itself

On a winter evening during the second year of the project, a workshop about the progress of the project was going on. That day I was assigned to lead the contradictions workshop. I still remember the large group of people from the community, most of them young people between 20 and 30 years old and some older.

My tutor, Mr. George Packard, was sitting very close to the front. We started very well with everyone writing their ideas individually. Since there were many participants, ten groups were formed. Within each group they shared their individual ideas, and then transferred each of the chosen ideas to individual cards. As a facilitator, I asked for two ideas per group at the beginning that I placed on the board in front of me. Immediately others passed more cards; and due to the great excitement and enthusiasm, I forgot to stop them. Suddenly I found myself with many cards/ideas in front. George was looking looking straight ahead, with an expression somewhat between worried and amused. Immediately, I began to ask questions to form pairs related to the question of the cause. In the end, with the collaboration of such enthusiastic participation, we had a great picture of contradictions, which would allow us to move forward with the creation of shared action for another two years.

In subsequent planning workshops, it might be thought that I would no longer accept a workshop of this nature. On the contrary, I had already learned from experience how important it is not to skip a step of a Consensus Workshop; and also I learned all the methodology developed and applied by so many people of the Institute of Cultural Affairs.

In planning workshops at community level or in a company: guess what, the contradiction workshop was the one I was assigned; I didn't think about it much anymore, it was already my challenge.

I am grateful for the many workshops and above all, the involvement of people in their development plans, the bringing out of human potential and reaching consensus in such a creative and orderly way. In relation to companies, I especially remember Guatemala in the 90's; how they involved their people; Don Rodolfo Paiz, as he considered the gardener in the Participatory Strategic Planning, who also gave a very great idea with all the company architects. Or what the contradiction workshop meant in 1993 for the president of Cementos Progreso Company. When we ended the day with actions/proposals created, he said that when he arrived home he felt between anxious and relaxed, and had a deep sleep.

Always learning...