

Facilitating Planning Workshops

or

Food that You Have Chosen Yourself, Tastes Better

by Rolf Gsell, LBL

In the beginning there was a story:

Martina and I have taken over the facilitation of a planning workshop for a new development programme. After intensive preparations, we are in good spirits and are relaxing over a drink. Martina mentions that some of the participants are not happy with the eating arrangements as proposed by our client, an international donor. "They do not want a communal dinner paid by the donor." The following day, the beginning of the workshop is characterised by the usual tension (35 participants from different social and cultural backgrounds, many meeting each other for the first time). When, however, I broach the subject of the eating arrangements and some of the participants' doubts, their faces light up with interest. We find a solution (every participant eats where and with whom he/she wants, the donor pays a slightly higher daily allowance) which in fact does not cost more. The five-day workshop ends successfully. The planned programme has now been running a few years and is characterised by a high degree of lively participation. I am convinced that the discussion on the eating arrangements laid the foundation for this active participation. The following article will elaborate this experience even further.

Thinking back on my experiences with planning workshops, I was inspired by the works of G.S. Becker and F. B. Simon¹. They describe the "economics of human behaviour" and maintain that human behaviour is "economically rational" (see table "radical market economy"). Thus one can also view cooperation and interactions amongst various stakeholders in interna-

tional cooperation (i.e. IC; the very language betrays how "economical" even thinking is in IC) as different stock markets. The daily operational project routine can be seen as the normal market where behaviour, goods and money are exchanged. Planning workshops have a different character in that derivatives (futures and options) are traded and "commodity futures transactions" concluded. All "stakeholders" behave in an economically rational way. Similar to these cunning stockbrokers on derivative stock markets, participants of planning workshops have their own personal strategies to protect themselves from risks and to increase their profits.

Using this perspective, a number of ideas and tips can be derived for the facilitation of planning workshops.

- 1. At the time when the workshop is commissioned and clarified, and especially at the beginning of the workshop, pay careful attention to the pattern and dynamics of "give and take" mechanisms.**
 - The basis of the clarification at the beginning of a workshop is comprised of context, problem statements, general objectives and specific planning results. (How open/broad or specific/narrow should the planning be?) During these first contacts with the client, I also ask questions on the participants and their already existing relationships.
 - The following are such questions:
 - Who is invited and why? (what should he/she bring along?)
 - What were the relationships amongst the participants up to now?
 - How do they assess the present relationship balance?
 - Which of the participants' relationship and interaction patterns and roles are already predetermined?

¹ F.B. Simon: Radikale Marktwirtschaft – Grundlagen des systemischen Managements, Carl-Auer-Verlag, 2001

Themes of “Radical market economy” (“Radikalen Marktwirtschaft”)

1. He who acts, trades. Every human action in social systems can be seen as a commodity.
2. The market for behaviour is generally trade by barter. Some “standardised” behavioural patterns are paid for by money.
3. People and organisations always and everywhere behave in an “economically” (in a wider context) rational way.
4. Every individual rates his own behaviour (=commodity) and that of others according to his personal individual standards (his own value system). There are no objective assessment standards for behaviour.
5. Everyone keeps an account of the give and take transactions of all the interacting partners (his own and that of others) in his private, non-convertible currency. The individual value systems and the type of accounting determine the patterns of interaction and relationships amongst participants. “Personality”, “character” and “personal identity” can be explained in terms of functional differences in individual accounting practices.
6. Individuals and organisations have preferred market strategies. From experience they know what they must offer (or not offer = refrain) on a particular market to obtain the goods they desire.
7. The degree of bonding to a social system depends on the number and quality of the bartered goods (as compared in other social systems).
8. The motivation to remain in a “market” (=social system), or to go into another “market” is determined by:
 - The current personal balance and the profit prospects for the future.
 - Balance assessment of the others, i.e. their profit prospects (Careful: Debts which cannot be paid have a great explosive power!)
 - The assessment of the general development of a specific market compared to other possible markets (the “mood of the stock market”)

(adapted from Simon 2001)

At the beginning of such workshops the standards and rules of the game for the “give and take” transactions are set (the “market code”, or the dinner in our example). In this the facilitator plays a decisive role. To a great extent he is the model and example, i.e. the group gratefully accepts his interaction patterns, if they prove to be attractive and helpful in the context of the common task. The facilitator can suggest work modes, games and relaxation exercises which promote the exchange amongst the participants. The game, or rather the exchange of objects and symbols, helps participants to show their own interaction patterns and to observe those of the others.

2. Pay attention to the participants’ role interests; write down your topics and review them.

By role interests are meant the interests which go beyond the personal interests of the individual. I see every participant as a representative of a part of an already existing social system, or of one which will be created by the planning. The role interests hint at

the important values and internal “currency system” which are used to assess the behaviour of the individual and of others. Even the facilitator holds hypotheses on the market and interest situation of different groups of participants. My experience has shown that it pays to write down these hypotheses, examine them (e.g. by triangulation and direct questioning) and ask oneself the following questions:

- What specific expectations do the participants have with respect to the future “give and take”? How do they want to change their market position? What are the client’s expectations in this regard?
- To what extent am I sure about the individual hypotheses?
- How do I obtain more information to complement my hypotheses?
- About what and in which way can discussions take place without worsening the market situation of individual participants?

Generally, the precept applies that market transparency increases market stability. The facilitator should enable optimal transparency. He has the right to suggest the procedure, for example:

- He can arrange sequences which provide the different participant groups with the opportunity to show as much of their personal currency system (e.g. assessment of behaviour and exchange processes which are already running) as they want to. Such sequences often evoke an aha-experience (“Well, well, the others really function and see things differently to me, but their systems are in themselves also harmonious”).
- A “wonder question” is sometimes also useful: “Imagine that you are absolutely satisfied and enthusiastic after the workshop. What happened during the workshop? (What did you get out of it?) What (type of) results were achieved? What will happen after the workshop?”

3. Direct attention to exchange processes in the “here and now”.

Like all derivative markets, planning workshops also have a speculative character. Only someone who knows the current market (what is exchanged, which shares are rising, which were good in the past) and on this basis can form a picture of the future, will be able to develop a sensible strategy for his activities on the derivatives market. The facilitator is not to become annoyed by discussions on daily allowances, participation conditions, room arrangements (with or without air-conditioning) or programme organisation. On the contrary, he should follow up these topics and clear the air. Such discussions provide participants with the opportunity to stake out their position in the current market and to observe those of the others. As a first step they will define the facilitator’s competence according to whether he acts in an open and helpful way.

The following can be useful to the participants in orienting themselves to the current market:

- Analyse their own competence and interests: What can I offer now? What would I like from the others and what is it worth?
- Analyse the competence and interests of the others: What can the others offer now and in the future and

what do they think it is worth? What would they like to gain?

The maxim “knowledge is power” particularly applies in such market analyses. Experienced participants of planning workshops prepare their homework already beforehand. They know what they want to gain and already have their hypotheses on the interests of the others. Especially in the beginning and during informal discussions one can again and again observe how old hands dig for information which enables them to better judge the interest position of the others.

4. Designing the negotiation phase and closing the contract in the WS.

The vocabulary from the world of the derivatives market can also be applied to planning in IC. The table on the following page shows a few examples.

The decisive questions for the design of the negotiation phase are:

- Who actually decides what?
- How much decision-making authority and negotiation leeway do the individual participants have?
- Who has the right to sign a binding contract?
- Which forms of negotiation have been handed down in the specific cultural and social context? Can these be taken up and adapted in the design of the process?

It is often useful to visually display (power) structures in the room. (e.g. The decision-makers form an inner circle, their negotiations can be observed by the other participants. Or optionally they can give a short feedback of their observations.)

An important task of the facilitator is to suggest the forms according to which the contracts are to be closed. On the one hand this involves an appropriate form of visualisation. Often it is useful to draw and apply a simple time-line (where are we now, where do we want to go and how does that path look, who contributes what to the success of the way). On the other hand, the symbolism of closing a contract is very important. In many societies closing a contract has a ritualistic character. Here, too, the facilitator has the right to make

Concept	Meaning in the world of the stock market	Possible meaning in an IC planning workshop
Option	<p>The right to buy or sell a specific share at a specific price.</p> <p>An example: A decentralisation project is to support the garbage disposal activities of a municipality if a guarantee is given that the community will actively participate. For this the mayor requires support and refers to the religious leader. The most influential mullah promises to actively assist the administration in solving the garbage problem. In turn he receives the assurance from the mayor that his building application for the extension of a mosque will be dealt with immediately. The application has been stuck in the bureaucratic bottleneck of the municipal administration for years.</p> <p>Another example: A steering committee is to be formed for the planned programme. On this committee the donor would like as high-ranking and competent a representative as possible from the relevant ministry. The ministry agrees. In turn the programme promises to make a financial contribution towards the holding of a national conference.</p>	<p>The right in the future to produce a specific commodity (behaviour) in exchange for another; that is, to acquire it.</p>
Futures	<p>Are a kind of insurance for risk mitigation. E.g. I have shares from the Japanese market and insure myself with a future against a general weakness of the Nikkei index.</p>	<p>The right also in the future to have a specific role in the planned activities. By participating in the workshop, the participants earn the right to also participate in the programme's success, whether in a material or non-material way. As the programme's success increases, the status of those who actively participate and contribute to the successful activities will also increase (together with their earning capacity on other markets).</p>

suggestions and should find an appropriate mode. I have made some good experiences by ceremonially signing a memorandum of understanding at the end of a workshop. I take care in choosing the locale (a historical site or somewhere which radiates dignity) and a clear procedure (possibly with transparent role distributions: Who is the contractual partner, who is the witness?).

5. Participation and trust.

Within this concept of a radical market economy, the commonly-used (and practised with such difficulty) terms "participation" and "trust" can be viewed differently.

The interest to participate and the preparedness to invest (advance concessions, "commitment" in general) of the participating individuals and organisations depend on the following factors:

- They "know" that the joint activities (project, programme) have good success prospects within the given framework (the general market index goes up).

- Already during the preparation and planning phases contacts were made and exchange processes initiated which positively credited the individual "accounts of the participants".
- They know that in future they will profit from their participation, provided that project logic and organisation are understandable and consistent with each participant's value system.
- Every participant feels sufficiently secure with the interest and the "profit expectations" of all the others. All "know" that "lose-lose" and "win-lose" situations spawn tensions. They weigh up whether they would cope with these and, if so, how.

Trusting each other means that the participants know that the balance of giving and taking will even out and that all the participants enjoy dealing with each other.