

Questionnaire – Relation to the participants

RELATION TO THE PARTICIPANTS: HIERARCHY OR HORIZONTALITY

How do we relate to participants, what power distance do we wish to maintain, how asymmetrical do we see the role of learner / teacher? A focus on how we regulate our relationship to learners.

What is this dimension about?

One of the key features of a learning experience is the hierarchical distance between learners and teachers. In a vertical setting the roles are very asymmetrical: the teacher is seen as the one possessing the relevant knowledge, responsible for passing it to the learners, who are passive receptors. In a horizontal setting the contributions of participants are valorised, their experiences considered important. Several factors can influence the positioning of a pedagogical intervention on the vertical / horizontal scale, not just the personal dispositions of the trainer. The institutional culture, the national culture of the facilitator and also the participants also matter. Indeed, according to Hofstede there are national cultures more oriented towards higher power distance and other oriented towards horizontality. But what is the consequence of a hierarchical learner – facilitator relationship? Does this necessarily have a negative impact on learning?

According to Bourgeois and Nizet (1997:171) socio-cognitive conflicts are a key element in the learning process. These consist in social confrontations of several points of view. They become a resource when

they are followed by the resolution of the conflict through the elaboration of a new answer. In asymmetrical settings this elaboration and negotiation is replaced by a relational regulation, that gives priority to the answer provided by the party with higher status, that is the facilitator (p. 187). In a training setting the roles are by definition asymmetrical, but the facilitator can opt for a variety of strategies to compensate this asymmetry. The question at this point is whether or not she wishes to do so.

Presentation of categories

- Epistemic position: the trainer appears as the monopolistic source of knowledge, her questions to learners are not open questions but inquire into whether the learners know the correct answer.
- Discipline: the trainer exerts her authority by limiting the freedom of the learners by establishing a strict discipline and control of the learners
- Use of space and time: the trainer occupies a privileged part of space (the front) and speaks most of the time, as what she says is more relevant than what the learners could say. Time and space are not shared equally.
- Decision-making: the teacher is responsible for making decisions or the group
- Divergence / convergence: The students are expected to adjust to the facilitator in terms of rhythm, style, etc.

