

The Courage to Speak. The Willingness to Listen.

Leading Multicultural Teams - Different Perspectives: Better Decisions.

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An online learning programme for managers and professionals in humanitarian, development and peacebuilding (HDP) organisations. For discussion, not a final course proposal.

The central idea

Every team holds knowledge and experience that can improve its decisions. Cultural, language and status differences can make that knowledge harder to share and use, yet international work depends on shared understanding.

Here, psychological safety means people feel able to speak up, ask questions or admit mistakes without being humiliated or punished. Social safety concerns organisational protections and procedures, including safeguarding and reporting. The course builds everyday team behaviours that support psychological safety and complements, but does not replace, those protections.

Value proposition

Help managers draw on knowledge across teams and communities to make better decisions.

The challenge

Managers work with limited time and incomplete information. Power, culture, language and professional background shape whose knowledge is heard and trusted.

- **International staff** bring experience from other contexts and an outside perspective that can challenge established practices. Short postings may leave little time to understand local relationships, history and everyday realities.
- **National staff** bring deep knowledge of local institutions, communities and relationships. Like everyone, they may hold assumptions or social biases, and cannot represent every community or experience.
- **Short-term consultants** bring specialist expertise and established approaches, but limited time can make it difficult to test them against local realities or hear a wide range of views.

No one has the complete picture. These strengths can complement each other, but power differences shape who feels able to speak. Silence is not always a lack of courage: when people depend on a manager or organisation, speaking up can carry real costs. Community members may also fear losing access to assistance. Managers need practical ways to bring perspectives together.

Why it matters now

When budgets shrink and rights come under pressure, powerful voices can crowd out others. Making space to listen becomes even more important, especially to people whose knowledge and concerns may otherwise be missed.

Listening cannot remove these pressures, but it helps managers question assumptions and keep decisions grounded in people's lives. Taking contributions seriously and responding openly can build trust, strengthen cooperation and help scarce resources support goals that people value and can sustain.

Our ambition

Help HDP managers and professionals create environments where people want to contribute, feel safe doing so and know their contributions are valued. The aim is to build practical habits that improve everyday conversations, decisions and working relationships.

Three abilities

Be aware of your assumptions. Notice how your experience, culture and position shape what you believe. Check what you know, what you are assuming and whose perspective is missing. New information may confirm, refine or change your view.

Create conditions to speak. Recognise how power, language and leadership behaviour affect participation. Invite different views, reduce barriers and offer ways to raise concerns that fit the situation. Help people feel that contributing is worthwhile.

Listen, learn and act. Respond with curiosity, even when feedback is difficult to hear. Check what you understood, explain the next step and follow up. If you cannot act on a suggestion, say why.

A moment from practice

In his Moments that Matter interview, Devanand Ramiah recalls being friendly towards national colleagues in Timor-Leste without fully trusting their professional judgement. During voter registration, they brought local knowledge of people and villages that he did not sufficiently draw on. In later assignments, he learned to rely on national colleagues' knowledge to guide his work and achieve results.

What knowledge in my team am I failing to use—and what could I do differently?

[Listen to Devanand's interview on Spotify](#)

Two interconnected courses

Leading Multicultural Teams

First priority. For team and programme managers, senior managers and organisational leaders, especially those working with national and international colleagues.

The course explores how culture, hierarchy and everyday leadership affect openness. Participants practise inviting concerns, handling disagreement and bringing different kinds of knowledge into team decisions. Power differences between national and international staff receive particular attention.

Listening to Communities

Future development. For programme managers, community engagement, monitoring and evaluation, and accountability staff, as well as organisational leaders.

The course will explore how power, dependency and organisational practices affect honest feedback and participation. It will help professionals hear less visible perspectives, check their understanding and show how community views influence decisions.

Both courses share the three abilities and learning approach.

How the learning works

Participants work at their own pace with real experiences from Moments that Matter, short exercises and situations from their own work. Each module follows a simple cycle: Recognise – Understand – Practise – Apply.

Short scenarios help participants practise responding to concerns or disagreement that may be difficult to hear. Three questions guide reflection: What did I assume? What did I discover? How did I respond?

The course uses clear English, roughly at B1 level. Two optional individual learning-support sessions of 45–60 minutes help participants apply the learning to their own challenges.