Debriefing Activities

WHAT & WHY

These guidelines give a possible structure for debriefing experiential learning activities (role-plays, games, simulations, …). For each of the steps the tool also provides you with a few possible debrief questions.

These guidelines can be used to prepare the debrief during the instructional design phase and are the start for customizing the debrief questions, that need to be adapted in function of :

- The specific learning objectives you want to focus on (most activities can be debriefed in different ways to highlight different learnings)
- The type of experiential activity (simulation, experiential game, incident method …)
- The group and experience of the participants during the activity

INSTRUCTIONS

Why do we debrief

The answer is relatively simple : people don't learn from the experiential activity as such, they learn from the 'reflection' on their experience. The main objectives of a debrief are :

- Help participants 'see' what happened during their experience
- Help them understand why things happened that way and how that influenced the outcome of the exercise
- Get feedback from others and understand feelings and reactions of the other participants
- Help them formalize their awareness and insight (can be structured through a model or theory brought in by the facilitator)
- Help them recognize similar 'processes' in their real working environment
- Help them construct 'alternative routes' for action in similar situations or conditions

Giving people the opportunity to speak out, to share feelings, etc.. is key for a good debrief, on the other hand it is important to facilitate the debrief, make sure people listen to each other, and move on from merely 'telling what happened' or as is often the case 'start to do the exercise again'

General setup

You can organize the debrief in different settings and in a combination of those :
- Individual reflection (with the help of an observation and reflection form)
- Reflection in duo's (with the help of an observation and reflection form)
- Per 'team' or 'role' in the experiential games. ex : the manager debrief / the workers debrief
- With input of dedicated observers (if they were present during the game)
- With the whole group

Recommendations

- Start with an individual reflection before starting with the team debrief, it allows people to unwind, structure their feelings,… before they start with the plenary debrief
- Try to maintain a balance between structure and flow. Prepare a number of questions but encourage spontaneous comments from participants
- Formulate, based on the learning objective of the exercise a few key messages as 'round up' for the debrief.

MOVE!

Six phases of debriefing and example questions

*People don't learn from experience; they learn from **reflecting** on their experience.*

Ventilate feelings

This phase gives the participants an opportunity to get strong feelings and emotion off their chest. It makes it easier for them to be more objective during the later phases.	▪ *How do you feel about the outcome ?* ▪ *How did you feel during the exercise ?* ▪ *Did you feel 'engaged', enthused, involved during the exercise ? why or why not ?* ▪ *…*

Assemble facts and observations

In this phase, collect data about what happened during the activity. Encourage the participants to compare and contrast their recollections and to draw general conclusions during the next phase. (if you have recordings, you can use the video material as 'feedback' and confront them with what 'really happened') Begin this phase with a general question, and then zoom in on specific things that happened during the activity.	▪ *What happened ?* ▪ *Who took which role ?* ▪ *When that first task failed, what happened then ?* ▪ *How did you react on that ?* ▪ *Was at that stage, the objective clear for you ?* ▪ *Why did you refuse to do that ?* ▪ *…*

Learnings

In this phase, encourage the participants to generate and test different hypotheses. Ask the participants to come up with principles based on the activity and discuss them. Begin this phase by presenting a principle and asking the participants for data that support or reject it. Then invite the participants to offer other principles based on their experiences.	▪ *What is the consequence for the activity, if one person says 'he knows how to do it' and starts doing it ?* ▪ *What do we learn from that ?* ▪ *What does that tell you about the importance of feedback ?* ▪ *…*

How does that relate to the real work situation?

In this phase, discuss the relevance of the activity to the participants' real-world experiences. Begin with a broad question about the relationship between the experiential learning activity and events in the workplace. Suggest that the activity is a metaphor and ask participants to offer real-world analogies.	▪ *You see similar things happen at work ?* ▪ *Can you share with us a real work experience where similar 'mechanisms' occurred ?* ▪ *How does that impact on your performance ?* ▪ *How do you deal with that in real life ?* ▪ *How do people react if you do that at work ?* ▪ *…*

What could you do differently ?

In this phase, encourage the participants to apply their insights to new contexts. Use alternative scenarios to speculate on how people's behaviors would change. Begin this phase with a change scenario and ask the participants to speculate on how it would have affected the process and the outcomes of the activity. Then invite the participants to offer their own scenarios and discuss them.	▪ *What could you do differently ?* ▪ *How would that impact your performance ?* ▪ *Based on what you learned, how would you deal with that upcoming challenge ?* ▪ *What prevents you of doing it ?* ▪ *What would make it possible for you to try that out ?* ▪ *…*

What's next ?

In this phase, ask the participants to undertake action planning. Ask them to apply their insights from the experiential activity to the real world. Begin this phase by asking the participants to suggest strategies for use in future rounds of the activity. Then ask the participants how they will change their real-world behavior as a result of the insights gained from the activity.	▪ *What did you learn from this experience ?* ▪ *What do you want to achieve now, in your real world ?* ▪ *What are you going to do ?* ▪ *When would you be satisfied ?* ▪ *How could you create the 'right conditions' to succeed in this ?* ▪ *What do you expect your team mates (here in the room) to do to support you ?* ▪ *…*

MOVE!