

Tool 26: Role Plays

Aim of the tool

To develop communicative skills, creating in depth understanding of a situation and other stakeholders' perspectives.

When to use it?

Role plays can be used in many stages of an MSP, in particular when there is an element of capacity building involved.

What is a Role Play?

Role playing is an interactive tool which stimulates learning. In role plays, participants are put in a setting where they have to act out a certain scenario. There are no fixed lines or rehearsals beforehand.

Role plays are often used to make sense of theory by gathering concepts together into a practical experience. Role playing essentially is about thinking of a 'what-if' scenario. As E. Harbour and J. Connick put it,

“By indulging in a role play we are projecting ourselves into an imaginary situation where, though we cannot control the outcome, we can anticipate some or all of the outcomes and ‘rehearse’ our performance in order to influence the outcome.”

Role Plays - Step by step

Participants are prepared for a role play by providing a sketch of the situation and distributing different perspectives on the situation to all participants. Each role description includes an objective to be fulfilled during the play. These objectives might be in conflict with the objectives of fellow role players. The essence of the role play is to experience how each player handles the situation. In the play itself, participants have to react in the moment according to the role or perspective they have been assigned to, thereby simulating real life encounters.

After the role play, participants are asked to reflect upon what they have experienced during the play.

In MSPs role plays can stimulate learning on several levels:

- In depth understanding of a case or situation;
- Better understanding of one's own communicative strategies and capabilities;
- Developing skills such as conflict management and negotiation;
- Improve the understanding of group processes and how to influence them;
- Create a better understanding of the perspective of other stakeholders, stimulating empathy, mutual understanding.

Observation and feedback

Assign one or two participants as observers to provide feedback after the role play. It should be clear for observers, what is expected of them. The feedback provided to the participants afterwards should be as objective as possible without including subjective judgment. Furthermore, feedback should be meaningful and specific, so that the role player can act upon it.

It is important to give those who participated in the role play the time and space to reflect on their own experiences before any feedback is provided by an observer. In this way, they are not already influenced by the views of the observer.

Learn more

E. Harbour and J. Connick (2004) Role playing games and activities, rules and tips.
<http://www.businessballs.com/roleplayinggames.htm>

Johns Hopkins University (2015) Facilitating role play exercises.
<https://www.fptraining.org/resources/facilitating-role-playing-exercises>