

Appreciative DiversityMediation – A way to manage diversity for social sustainability

One introduction, three interrelated approaches, one business-case, and five conclusions

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Since 2008 Jule Endruweit and Katharina Stahlenbrecher, **intaqt**, are combining Transactional Analysis (TA) with diversity-management and mediation in our consultancy. Since 2016 we introduce our ideas at German and international TA conferences and in the German context of mediation at Hagen University and associations (DGM, Mediationszentrum Berlin).

Christine Ehlers at **werterleben** developed in 2016 a systematic approach to appreciation as an attitude. Mediation, according to her understanding, is an attitude with method.

Together, we started this year our educational program called “appreciative DiversityMediation”. On this occasion, it seemed to be time to share our initial idea, some experiences and further developments with the EDI - world.

Our conceptual line of thoughts

We felt encouraged to merge our approaches, because the very idea of mediation is to increase the range of options by uncovering individual, underlying motives thereby orienting them at the common (or given) aim.

And diversity management, on the other hand, seeks to orient at the necessary (the common or given aim of operation/performance, no matter who will fulfil the tasks).

Systemically, both can be described as the search for the functional equivalent - How do we fulfil our task equally good but in a different way? Therefore, it

seems practical to use the frame of mediation for managing diversity in an organisation, and vice versa, to think, feel and apply diversity management in mediation.

Based on neuroscientific findings, we describe an attitude as a set of action-guiding inner plans or images based on experiences in which thoughts, feelings and sensations are linked together.

Motives are located there. The mediation offers time venue and protection to reflect thoughts, feelings and sensations associated with the conflictual situations. This is how we

invite the mediated to reflect their motives – What exactly is different in our ways to fulfil our tasks?

Since an attitude is developed from experiences it can be changed by new experiences. A mediation is a structured process designed to enable new experiences. The approach “appreciative DiversityMediation” opens space for unfolding the constructive potentials of individual motives as well as diversity aspects in achieving common aims through conscious and appreciative communication.

Thus, we argue, this approach is suitable for achieving social sustainability by enhancing people’s trust in self efficacy as well as conflict-

solving competences, and by providing a basis for the decision to adopt an appreciative attitude towards diversity, conflictual situations, and one’s own ways of solutions.

In the following, we will sketch out modern mediation in Germany, followed by a brief introduction into the layers and forms of appreciation. A case study will then clearly show the benefits of appreciative mediation for managing diversity successfully and effectively. In our conclusion, we will outline our four essential learnings in brief.

As this paper is intended to contribute to the EDI conference we focus on the probably rather unknown approaches of mediation and appreciation.

Part 1: Methodology

1.1 How does mediation work?

Modern mediation in Germany is based on three columns:

It generally runs through a 5-Step procedure

1. Preparation

it includes agreeing on the procedure and its principles, the mediator, the costs, and sharing the aim of the mediation, the setup of the mediation-system by negotiating the code of conduct (norming)

2. Identification of issues

"Precisely what topics need to be settled?"

3. Analysing the issues by

searching for underlying motives

"How would you personally / in your position / your organisation benefit from this settlement? Why does this matter to you?"

4. Developing options,

recognising the motives, discussing

and analysing solutions including the

questions "What do we consider a fair

agreement? How the options lead to the common or given aim?"

5. Ratify and review the agreement

II It follows 5 principles

1. Neutrality, or better say commitment to all parties

The mediating person is neutral toward the dispute and assists all parties appropriately.

2. Confidentiality

The Parties agree, to what extend information will be given to others and the public throughout and after the mediation.

3. Voluntariness

The Parties must not be forced into mediation nor into any agreement.

4. Individual Accountability

The parties show and take responsibility for their own actions and decisions.

5. Informational Balance

Only the parties have the knowledge to appreciate information or its lack. In case, the mediating person recognises a disbalance of power or unfairness

due to withheld information, she will communicate her impression and offer time to balance information.

III The function of the mediating person

His or her role is to facilitate the process and guide the parties through it. The development of an attitude according the principles of mediation is the bedrock for this role which is accomplished through offering methods that help the parties

- broadening the range of possible solutions to the conflict by taking underlying motives into consideration
- thinking new "third options",
- search for the common or understand the given necessities
- accepting differences as given
- recognising dispute as a fruitful contribution to development

This brief description already shows, how close the frame of mediation is to managing diversity. We now will sketch the approach of appreciation as an attitude

1.2. Seven Forms of Appreciation on Three Levels

An internal attitude as such is invisible. It takes shape through seven forms which can be located on three levels.

Level 1: Communication

1. Acknowledging Language
verbal expression of true recog-

nition and empathy; verbal discrimination between factual level and relationship level; questions: „is a praise really appreciative?“ “what’s the difference between acknowledging and appreciating?“

2. Body Language / Body Contact
cultures of strong vs discrete body language; body contact and diversity aspects; (in-)congruence of body language and verbal expression
3. Undivided Attention
“To whom do I pay attention, when and how?”; methods of deep/active listening; undivided attention in action
4. Touching Gestures
awareness, mindfulness, regard through little actions, gifts, gestures

Level 2; Performance

5. Appearance
the meaning of dress codes, posture, presence

Level 3: Intention

6. Helpfulness / Cooperation
has to be appropriate to a given situation; raises questions of altruism, self-elevation or oppression; drama triangle
7. Authorisation / Empowerment

Delegation styles; giving and taking responsibility, trust, free space

Every individual has his or her preferred form of showing appreciation generally and situationally. Conflicts can arise if two persons prefer differing forms because they don't identify the other one's action or behaviour as a means to show appreciation. Reflecting on the very fact, that we express appreciation differently can pave the way to unfolding underlying, individual motives. Mediation provides a variety of methods to do so. An appreciative attitude is exactly what a mediator in his or her role must develop according to the five mediation principles.

The following case will provide deeper insights into our work. It was conducted by Katharina and Meike. We chose this example, because it shows the multiple layers of diversity and their link to appreciation, to mediation as well as to management of diversity. We will give insights into the process of diversity mediation in portions. Each portion will be followed by an interim conclusion.

Part 2: Business case and reflections

2.1. Situation and preparations

Ten years ago, three brothers founded SOZIA, a consultancy agency for economic and individual development. They started with 10 employees, grew

up to 50 persons and continued to grow. The brothers hired a young master of business administration as the head of the front office. Explicitly chosen for his business and adminis-

trative knowledge he was the first of his kind in a group of graduates from humanities and social sciences and of social practitioners. He was supposed to modernise the organisation and introduce the idea of leadership in a hierarchy.

His opponent is one of his team members, a historian. She stayed with SOZIA since its foundation, attending and supporting the organisation's founding and growth. She likes its social attitude and its general orientation. Of course, her work content has changed and developed throughout the years, she knows everyone and everything.

These two quarrelled about nearly every aspect of work, be it organization, administration, modes of operandi, codes of conduct, way of communication and briefings or feedback culture. The dispute affected the team's performance already.

At that point, the brothers engaged us for a one-day-mediation. They hoped to avoid dismissal of one or both employees.

We agreed on a contract that says:

- 1) Aim of the mediation is
 - a) to manage the conflict on the personal level to avoid dismissal
 - b) to enable a status of cooperation.
- 2) Confidentiality means:

a) they agreed not to know, what is happening in their own organisation.

b) It was the party's duty to inform the directors about agreed aspects or results of the mediation.

c) Upon completion of the mediation process, the mediators will share information with the directors, that seem relevant to the organisation as a system and shed light on their (the brother's) contribution to the dispute.

3) - This contract will be transparent to the parties.

During preparatory talks the opponents stressed the impact of gender, age and seniority combined with the educational background of "the other". They expressed upset about the "typical youngish, conscious of one's power, business administrating male," or "typical aged, senior, social and emotional woman".

Their aims for the mediation were

- to revise specific situations,
- to clarify how to communicate appreciation and
- to negotiate and find a new code of conduct.

2.1.2. Interim conclusions

So far, we recognised emotional entanglement on all for layers of diversity.

- organisational dimension: functional level, management status, personal networks and seniority
- external dimension: educational background, work experience and personal habits
- internal dimensions: age and gender
- personal dimensions: emotional, being conscious of one's power.

At the same time, the conflict partners did refer only to some of these aspects. Their perception of diversity was dominated by the polarisation of male and female. The aspects of the other three layers were submitted to them and meant to describe their idea of patterns as typical behaviour. This mental polarisation was one reason for the parties to get stuck in their quarrel.

The contract with the client (the two brothers) realises appreciation on level of "intention" in the sense of authorisation / empowerment. The agreement supported self-responsibility, self-efficiency and trust. The two aims formulated at the beginning refer to typical bases for emotional employee retention (e.g. Gallup Engagement Index) and low turnover.

The conflict partner's idea of means of conflict-solving addressed directly one form of appreciation (communication) and a possible strategy to do so (revise specific situations).

2.2. Code of conduct

The mediation started with negotiating the code of conduct - the norming of the mediation system. We ask specifically: "How do you recognize patronising?" or "How can your colleague recognise, that you mean to be objective?" They agreed to

- do only specific statements
- ask for specific information,
- listen carefully up to the end.
- allowing the mediator's interventions and mirroring.

2.2.1. Interim conclusion

This consent already anticipates parts of the later agreement and lies bases for it. "Listen carefully" is a behaviour corresponding to the appreciative form "undivided attention". Becoming specific in the sense of non-violent communication for example helps identifying and reshaping the emotional, cognitive, and perceptual set connected to a situation.

By asking for allowance for intervening and mirroring, the mediators realised an appreciative attitude in the share of helpfulness / cooperation.

2.3. Issues, options, and motives

While raising the question, whether to review and revise past time situations, the whole conflict repeated itself. We offered to mediate this specific question within the mediation. This

helped the opponents to understand the motive of the other party, that the opinions were not driven by the attempt to hurt the other side but by logic. We helped them reframing their conflict-solving strategy by suggesting two more questions:

a What is the good in looking back when I now I can't change the past?

b How can I learn for future situations, if I do not learn from the past?

The recognition of inner logic helped the opponents to agree on starting with future aspects and look back only occasionally, on demand.

At this point the parties understood, - that they don't need to discuss in a polarising and excluding attitude of "either - or", but can find solutions in an including "as well as".

- that the argumentation of the other side followed an inner logic, that differed from their own.

This norming helped along the following process. During the further steps the parties elaborated a variety of perspectives on their functions. In sum they pointed out to organisational necessities. It became obvious, that both parties had tried to fill a vacuum, which, by function, should have been filled by the directors.

2.3.1. Interim conclusions

The stereotyped diversity aspects (age, length of service, gender, emotionality/

rationality) originally identified and stereotyped by the conflict partners as a cause and effect of conflict receded into the background in the course of the procedure and in the face of the requirements. The functions and their implementation became important.

The participants recognised that the stereotypes' assessments led to conflict and formulated the review of assumptions into the outcome. The refusal of the mediators to agree with one side or to follow the conclusions within the framework of the respective "normality" brought the desired disenchantment.

Although the revision of a situation – e.g. with the method “specific situation” – can be a useful strategy to express appreciation, strong negative emotions connected to that situation might trigger relatively autonomous reaction patterns. For the mediators, appreciating that fact meant to offer tools for shifting the focus away from the undesired towards the desired - the functional equivalent. As a mediator by role is not a counsellor but a facilitator instead, posing helpful questions is one of the most employed mediation methods. It helps the mediants to discover their unique problem-solving strategies which provides the neurobiologically important experience of being capable and will eventually result in new problem-solving patterns.

2.4. The agreement

All in all, the two agreed on qualified coexistence", they specified new ways to communicate. It included

- check criticism before sharing for being specific, having a measurable base, hinting at a wanted direction
- fill in information gaps
- hold back with criticism in a tense situation, but create a new one for sharing
- respect the need for protection
- stick to the cause
- formulate adequately
- anger is human and can and should be expressed
- I am careful with assumptions and hold them back for two times
- I am willing to recognise new experiences
- I express my appreciation

The wish to revise situations has not been fulfilled. Instead, the participants agreed on the new code of conduct for future situations. This created the first challenge for the agreement, since the historian has been confronted with a typically conflictual situation in which she expected apologies from the front office's head. The test was successful:

- She understood that he will not apologise as long as he doesn't see a reason why.
- He understood that he did something,

that was worth apologising for from her point of view.

Next time, they will manage the very same situation in a different manner.

2.4.1. Interim conclusion

The mediation succeeded in supporting social sustainability on the individual level by clarifying and reflecting different personal motives and styles of expressing appreciation. Secondly the mediation supported social sustainability on the organizational level as both conflict partners decided to stay with the organization.

But the mediation failed in supporting social sustainability on the level of organizational culture as already indicated.

The conflict of the two did not occur in the void. It was fuelled by a profound lack of leadership on the topmost level. The brothers have tried to diversify their organisation without managing the heterogeneity. There was no organisational clarity about the function of business management approaches in the organisation that has so far been dominated by the humanities. The full extent of the vacuum and the leadership weakness only became apparent in the course of the mediation and was reflected back to the client (the brothers).

Part 3: Conclusions

In the beginning, we argued that appreciative DiversityMediation is suitable for achieving social sustainability. The case supports this:

1. Mediation is an approved way to intervene in conflicts, also those driven by aspects of diversity.
2. It offers venue, time and protection for new experiences to communicate, perform and intend, that lead to the development of new attitudes.
3. The insights provided by managing diversity help to identify, whether

aspects of diversity are the cause of the dispute, or an effect, or both.

Mediation can thus be a way to leave patterns behind and experience new ones.

4. The frame of mediation, especially the third step to share the motive, idea or function is helpful way to publish the reason of diversification
5. Developing appreciation by means of mediation and managing diversity turns out to be a promising way to path the way for introducing sustainability into relations.

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