

# Factual Listening: Paraphrasing

When team members or conflict parties talk about their views of the conflict, they often get **lost in the details**.

Sometimes they insult, accuse and attack other team members or the other party.

Facilitators or mediators can prevent this by **paraphrasing the narrations of the parties**, that is, by **restating the content of what has been said in their own words** and **laundering the wording of insults and accusations**.

# Purpose of paraphrasing

- Highlighting the **key points** of a narration.
- **Structuring a narration:** the facilitators/mediators identify different elements of what has been said and place them in relation to each other, e.g. by reflecting the degree of importance attached to them.
- **Communicating empathy and understanding:** the facilitators/mediators demonstrate that they have grasped the speaker's meaning.
- Giving the conflict party a means to **check whether the facilitators/mediators have understood their message correctly.**
- **Creating clarity:** the facilitator's/mediator's paraphrase gives the speaker an opportunity to look at the topic/conflict with a certain distance and to gain a better understanding of his/her own perspective.

# Purpose of paraphrasing

- **De-escalation:** the facilitators/mediators “launder” the narration of vicious or insulting statements to make it less inflammatory, while retaining the basic points that were made. Thus the facilitators/mediators assist the conflict parties in moving beyond rhetoric and threats.
- **Slowing down communication:** when the (conflict) parties have embarked on a rapid exchange of insults and accusations, paraphrasing slows down the pace of a narration and changes its tone.
- Moving the conversation to **deeper levels:** a good paraphrase often brings out further, more reflective statements from the speaker.

# How to paraphrase

When you paraphrase, you:

- **Restate in your own words** the **basic facts** of the speaker's message, e.g. *“Your crops have been destroyed again by your neighbour's cattle.”*
- Draw attention to **interests, needs and feelings**: when you detect interests and feelings in the speaker's message, it is important that you bring these to light, e.g. *“You said that you feel betrayed by the other party.”*

## How to paraphrase

- **Use your own words and do not act like a parrot, e.g.:**

*Conflict party: “I resented it deeply when I found out that they had gone behind my back.*

*Why can’t they come and talk to me, and give me a chance to sort things out with them?”*

*Paraphrase: “You were quite hurt that they didn’t come directly to you to resolve things.”*

*NOT: “You resented it deeply that they went behind your back. You wish they had given you a chance to sort things out with them.”*

# How to paraphrase

- **Be brief and succinct:**

A paraphrase should always be shorter than the speaker's own statement, so keep to the key elements of what has been said and leave out unnecessary details and explanations.

- **Laundry the speaker's language**, i.e. rephrase the statement so that insulting words or accusations are omitted, e.g.:

*Conflict party: "He is a liar."*

*Paraphrase: "You find it difficult to believe him."*

## How to paraphrase

- **Highlight the positive, e.g.:**

“You think it is a good sign that your neighbour has agreed to this meeting/mediation.”

- **Do not give your own personal opinion** and only make suggestions to the degree that it does **not violate the principle of self-determination.**
- **Do not say anything that might sound as if you agree with the speaker:** showing agreement or even support will lead the other party to protest or even withdraw from the dialogue/mediation.

# How to paraphrase

- **Focus on the Speaker, e.g.:**

*“YOU felt...” – “YOU are saying...” – “YOU believe...”*

*And not: “I know exactly how you feel.” –*

*“I’ve been in situations like that myself.”.*

- Always **verify whether your paraphrase is correct**, e.g.:

*“Is this impression correct?”*

*“Does this adequately reflect your view points?”*

# Practicing in groups



**Teresa**

*Statement giver*



**Jan**

*Facilitator*



**Tanja**

*Observer... gives feedback*