



Podcast

# Creating a level playing field for collaboration

Tonnie van der Zouwen

## Episode 8 – Cihan Koral: From blue-collar workers to CEOs – Facilitating change of perspectives

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### Episode description

In this episode, we welcome Cihan Koral, a seasoned facilitator and consultant based in Istanbul. Cihan shares her rich experiences working with diverse groups, focusing on social change and inclusivity within organizations. She provides stories illustrating the importance of consciousness, trust, and perspective in facilitation. Cihan emphasizes the need for understanding privilege and guilt in organizational settings and advocates for Deep Democracy practices to foster open dialogue and transformation. She concludes with a vision for the future of facilitation, highlighting its potential for healing and empowerment. Tune in to learn from real-life examples and gain practical insights into the power dynamics in leadership and the need for safe spaces to foster honest conversations.

### Highlighted Examples:

- 1. Blue-Collar Workers and Music as Expression:**
  - A worker played a traditional instrument to express feelings, highlighting the importance of non-verbal communication.
- 2. CEOs and Power Dynamics:**
  - Cihan uses deep democracy to help CEOs explore power and privilege without feeling guilty, fostering inclusivity.
- 3. Correctional Facility Employees:**
  - A week-long program helped correctional staff realize their own constraints, promoting self-awareness and growth.

### Chapters

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### Introduction to Cihan Koral and her work

Tonnie: In this episode we welcome Cihan Koral. Welcome Cihan. Cihan: Hello. Tonnie: Can you please tell me something about yourself as an introduction? Cihan: Sure. Thank you for inviting me here. So I work as a facilitator and consultant, I even like to call myself unconsultant. With many groups, heavily with NGOs, initiatives, organizations and projects with some kind of a



social problem in their core. And then we try to work through this issue or around this issue, whatever needs to happen, we try to facilitate for that. It may happen in different countries or it can happen in the place I'm based in, Istanbul. But also my work happens with different levels. For example, I work with blue color also, but then I can work with decision makers in politics or it could be agricultural domain or students. So the level and the type of the group changes. what type of issues they contact you for? So I am usually contacted for... Either there is a big change happening in the organization or in the system and they want to be able to go through this and they have felt that they have stuck. So they want to unstuck from this and understand what's happening. Or we create projects together for a social change. It can be some subsets of human rights, labor rights, diversity, equity, belonging. Okay. Or it could be also you know, facilitating their periodic meetings, you know, let's come together and work on our issue on this, you know, sustainability goal or on this global challenge so that we know what's going on in our system. And when they contact me, we start with the perspective of whatever we do, starting from the first call, not the event itself, but the first call until the whole process ends, it is going to be reflecting the whole system we are in. And we are just the fractal pattern of what is happening around us. But also the whole system is just also a collation of what we are as fractals. So I think I also work with this consciousness that the whole process, each step, adds something in terms of inclusion. And belonging and also maybe conflict to our system.

### **Creating inclusive spaces in facilitation**

Tonnie: Okay, and we met at the World Open Space on Space in Istanbul and I posted the topic of the podcast and you responded to it, you said yes. What triggered you?

Cihan: I think first of all, I have a principle of if I feel an invitation, I would like to accept it. An invitation is of course from you personally also, but also from the question mostly. So the question of this level play field really attracted me and it was a great exercise for me. Thank you. And I thought... for some time to really see what is my goal too to create this level play field, which in my definition, in my head I translated it as, what do I do consciously and unconsciously to create not an equal maybe, but more or less accessible and inclusive field for all the partners, for all the stakeholders to be there together. I think this is a combination of what I have learned throughout the years and also what I bring personally. Yeah, so I noticed that this is also an important question for me. That's why I'm here.

### **The role of consciousness of power in facilitation**

Tonnie: Thank you. It's a nice translation of the question. Of course, the playing field is a metaphor I came across. Cihan: But what do I do to... create accessible and inclusive space. I would very much appreciate if you could tell something of your experience, what you do. Yes. So I went through many memories in terms of really trying to find a representative of creating this field. And the metaphor in my mind was it's like a baseball field or American football field, let's say, but it's not leveled. It's like a hiking terrain with many rocks and holes and ups and downs, but we are still trying to play in it. But some people who are there as players, they have been there before. And so they know what's going to happen. Some of them even brought more suitable accessories, equipment. And the others, they just came the morning. They flew in. It's a different atmosphere. It's a different weather. And then we pull up chairs and we make a circle. And then we say, this is the circle. It's a safe place. Let's talk. But actually, it is just because we pulled up chairs in a circle, does it become a safe space and inclusive space? So the image, literally the photo in my head, was this, thinking about the memories I had. I noticed that the...



My first to go about this levelling playfield is, first of all, making it conscious, making it known to the group for sure. And this making it known to the group can be in subtle ways.

It can be in the way that I am modelling it. For example, I'm also trying to catch the words of people who are assumed to talk less or people who are assumed to be not that important, not in explicit terms, in the social norms that we know. Or I might model it in a way that I follow up on things that everyone says, not just important ones.

But also I may model it in the sense that I am aware also of the good equipment that I'm also bringing, but maybe the others don't have it. Maybe sometimes as facilitators, when we go into a room, although we try to stay at the back and not to be the stars and we let the process go on, we still have a position to acknowledge. We still hold the power of that, let's decide on this day, even the loose structure is done by me. And sometimes maybe as facilitators, we don't think this is a power, but I think it is. So that is also something to make conscious of. Then I thought from this making it conscious, what do I do next? And some memories came to me about

When we make it conscious, not putting a group, a certain group or a certain person into the guilty chair. now we are going to be all equal and inclusive, but because of this person, we weren't. And now because they're guilty, we can all be innocent. So I think I'm trying very hard or I'm being very conscious on not trying to do this and putting the matter of fact, the phenomenon was going on into the spotlight and not the people. So nobody's guilty or nobody's the winner or the loser. But the concept, the role, the theme is in the middle. do you have maybe an example of? And I will have stories for all of these three steps. OK, OK. OK, after making it conscious for myself and for the group throughout the process, and then creating an atmosphere where actually we are not guilty or innocent, but we are all partly of these or none. And then also creating, not creating, but helping it to emerge as a place that it is okay, you can change your perspective. You're not going to be less if you say something else than what you started with. And you're not going to be being more. It's just going to be different. You can change it, and it's going to be OK. You can change your chair, or you can say, you know what? I know this place maybe is not really leveled. Should we move somewhere else to have a new perspective? Of course, these are all metaphors.

### **The experience of working with blue-collar people: music as language**

So once I have gone through this memory travel time, I thought about these things that come very intrinsic to the processes that I designed. And I remembered all the lovely people who made me realize these. So the one is... And they will not hear this probably, but I want to say verbally also my gratitude to them and my sincere thanks. So the first one I remember is I was working at the factory with blue collars on labor rights. And it is a very much facilitated loss program. There is no teaching, but I use all the process like auto posting activities. other World Cafe activities, some other Theory U activities to just make it emerge if they have problems in the workplace or in their lives. And we have become friends with these people, with the blue collar workers in time. I have gone there many times. It's in the middle of Anatolia. They're lovely people. But the fact is to me, it comes as they are too lovely. Like they're always happy. There are no problems. And I keep digging. Not explicitly, but I keep digging. And of course, their subconscious understands this, that I am doing the digging. And every time they're like, there's no problems. We're fine, this changed, we asked for this, this is also done, it's okay. And we are only in a room for us. There is no other person that would take notes. It's a safe environment,



we're friends. I have proved myself to be a trustworthy partner to them. So all the things in the list are done. But just it doesn't, I feel like, they're not holding back, but they don't even take time to think what could be changed or what is their problem. And probably at one time, I made it more conscious that I'm really actually looking for problems. And then one guy, the loveliest of them, he stood up. He went to somewhere. He came back with a Saz, which is like a national guitar, imagine it's a national guitar, it's a string instrument. So he brought his stuff, we're in a factory, a workplace. I don't know why he would even have it in the place. So he brought it and he played a very, how to say, he played on that moment, he created a song at that moment. So it was not a non-song. He replied to me in a song,

with a new song like music and lyrics that it's all fine, take care of yourself, we are taking care of ourselves, we will tell you if something is happening, but just let us be also fine. So that touched me greatly because actually at that point I was using what I know to be best, the words. Because it comes more easier to me, but probably the number of words that we use or the way we use them are different. And this wasn't a leveled play field for them. But it was the way that they described themselves with that music was OK for them. But then it was I was the one that would know what to do with that presence of that music. And I was like, yeah, thank you for translating this into your language. Now I understand. Now let's just sit here and talk about what others can play, what your favorite songs are. And then let's all be happy for this once.

So I wanted to share this because I was very, very touched and I noticed my own blind spot at that point. That words, even though of course I was using like a simpler language, daily language, even then some practices are not local to some places. And I think if we think this in a global scale, also, some would say some theories on the systemization of facilitation is almost a colonial practice because you go there and you know you should do this in that rule, in this rule, although you change it. So I think I saw a very, very small fractal pattern of that there. And I'm grateful that they made me experience this. So this was just one experience I remember of while thinking you are at a level field with trust and safety and friendship, you may not be.

Tonnie: Thank you. Music is language. It also resonates that maybe talking is only one way of sharing things. And music is another one. And maybe drawing or dancing or whatever are other ways of expressing. And how do you know what will be the good way?

### **Who feels most guilty? Levelling the playing field also for CEOs**

Cihan: That's a question. Then who came into my memories? I was thinking of this thing of not putting anyone on the guilty chair. And I thought, like, who feels most guilty in my, who feels most cornered? I think the executives and CEOs feel really cornered. Because also at some point they have to, the leaders let's say, they have to hold this position of all knowing and always calm and always guiding and never having questions or not knowing what to do. So when we are doing power and privilege, equity, diversity, inclusion sessions, I try to do them also in groups that are mostly leaders, where they can also ask questions. When it's mixed, it's more difficult to have some questions from the people who are cornered into leader position.

So I remember in one of those sessions with the CEOs. I'm talking about the facts that not assuming about others, not assuming about employees, what sentences are actually not OK in these times, and what sentences are not OK because of what, and what they think about this. And then if they're OK, to meet some of the employees in their organizations for some other



sessions. And also it was going to be by company by company. the companies were not going to see their each other's vulnerability. The room got so like scared. No, you know, I am not sure if, you know, if we can do this because I don't know the issue fully and how can we, how can it be an honest conversation about mistakes and power and privilege. And then, am I guilty because I have some privilege? Because we do also power walks. After power walk, they were like, and I come with the idea and they're like, so am I kind of guilty because I have this privilege? Or is it like I took someone else's place? And of course, we go on to explain that it's not that you took someone else's place, but that you're just aware of this is enough at this point. And then this guilt came.

So if we think we are not guilty of this, why are we feeling guilty? Then we had long sessions on actually how can we have a level play field, not only for the underprivileged, the vulnerable groups, or the groups in power that are in a lesser situation. But also people who are isolated and maybe few in number in a setting where they are ripped off their tools. I think in my heart, I'm lucky most of times, not always, but I'm lucky that I don't feel that people are guilty or they should be punished. So it came maybe as an attitude, trustworthy. And then we came into these sessions where actually

We see that also employees and also leaders share some of the ideas that they thought they didn't share. And there mostly I use deep democracy practices where the idea is in the middle and then or the phenomenon is in the middle. But then you can have different ideas. You can even have ideas that oppose each other. They can even come from you and that's okay. How does that work? Because then you will have leaders and employees in the same room? Yes. So you would use tools from deep democracy or process work or even if the group allows it could be theater of the oppressed later on. But at first with deep democracy, you would do things like, for example, let's talk about the transparency. And then it's an open question. It's not let's fix this or let's say problem I think. Let's talk about the transparency. And then you would just throw real sentences from real people. I think the transparency here is not enough for me. OK, if you agree, please move towards this person. And I think the transparency here is better. It was better before. OK, if you agree, please move. If you don't agree, maybe I walk around and I'm like, do you have another opinion? And if they have another opinion, they might say something like, the transparency is OK, but I don't like the accountability. And then maybe even the people who said transparency is okay would move forward for this person. But also we have some other tools like arguments, which is more decisive. You have two parts, two sides, where you share something like, do you need to take care of yourself in this company or can we rely on each other? And now you throw arrows of sentences from each side. It's not bosses versus employees, but it is a view versus another view. And all of us, all of us have to throw these sentences from each side. So if you are as a person in this argument, you have to send arrows from each side. So you feel it and you would even physically move yourself to different sides. And then at the end, it's a whole process. It takes several hours. And then you would say, okay, what stayed with me? What is the grain of truth here?

And if you get used to doing these tools, it would get shorter in time. And also you would have wiser decisions and wiser groups. So in terms of having guilt, you're eradicated mostly, but also in terms of knowing that you can share many views with someone, you are in an opposite position actually. It helps to relax the atmosphere.



## **Changing perspective: Prison employees becoming conscious of their own imprisonment**

Tonnie: Okay. Cihan: And while I was thinking of these people, so I thought to myself, okay, what else or whom else do I remember which really showed me that it is okay to change perspective. I haven't noticed this, although I'm still in this position. I'm still a teacher. I'm still a marketer. I'm still an NGO employee. I haven't.

Actually, I understand now from this, I were that, yeah, that could have happened. And that example came to me in a work that we have done with prison employees. And these employees include, and they are called what, Correctional Law Enforcement Officers and Guards, we'll say, just for the sake of shortness in this. Yeah. So it includes guards, the religious personnel, and we do like priests, imams. And teachers in the prisons, law enforcement facilities, medical personnel, so all these people who are working there. So it was a week long capacity building program and they were used to actually having programs that are kind of downloading, teaching them what to do, slides, power points, you know, those kind of things. And I noticed, of course, they're coming and going, but whatever they are living in those facilities and what is going on outside that facility has nothing to do with each other. It's like they move into a movie and they come out of a movie, or they move into a movie in a daily life, let's say. So we did, again, deep democracy processes, but again, Theory U also some practices because it was a week long.

And we had bodily somatic practices also, not art this time, but it was bodily practices. And imagine first day they're coming with their full gear on. They're coming with everything on them, although it's the civil gathering in the middle of the city. And then second day I see some guys, they have left their stuff. Third day, fourth day, they come in jeans and t-shirts. Even that. So I remember this guy's... sentence so vividly at the end that stayed with me and he said actually after all these work I realized that actually I'm a prisoner myself also and I have been lying to myself and I have been ignoring and thinking that it's okay to work this or it's okay it's a normal atmosphere that I don't have to work on myself because they were you know there was resistance to join to these kind of things before I'm on guard that I ignored the fact that I'm not in a very common place and I ignored the fact that I have to work on myself but now I realize that I am actually almost a prisoner because when they go in they have to leave their phones, they have to change their clothes, know, during daytime they live by the hours and the bells and everything and they come out so between 9 and 5.30 or 6.30 they live the exact same life.

Of course, there is some power difference, obviously. I don't want to underestimate any shifts there. But for them, not from the prisoner perspective, but for them, it was concluded that they should work on themselves. And actually, it's OK to change their perspective that, of course, there was a whole this issue of assumptions about prisoners, that the stereotypes and so on. So we worked about stereotypes and how can we have new pathways in our brains, so these stereotypes go weak and maybe disappear in time. But this actually I realized that I was sentenced, stayed with me for a long time. And that really felt like now when they go back, at least the field maybe it's not same for everyone, but at least it is understandable, it is seeable what's happening from other perspectives. So they can allow mothers to be with their kids more because there were some babies. They can allow babies to play with toys. These were all issues in that program. Yeah, this whole state.



## **Stop ignoring the gap between civil life and duty life, see yourself as a whole person**

Tonnie: Beautiful examples. Thank you. The sentence of the prison employee, what desire did you notice, you said, I realize I have to work on myself, that I'm a prisoner too. And what do you think was their desire?

Cihan: Hmm. As myself, my desire for them, although I have zero stance to ask from someone to do something, but it would be that they see this gap. They stop ignoring this gap between their civil life and their duty life. Okay. And for him, think, for him, his desire was that they can be vulnerable enough talk about what they are living in their work to their families. They never say what's going on. It's like also, you we know the phenomenon with soldiers also. When they go out, it's very difficult to combine two worlds with other people for them. But partly at some small level, maybe it is similar with CEOs, maybe it is similar with, you know, people that we go and we try to pull them into our activities, you know, in very different levels. But maybe it is this gap that we are trying to also see as a potential for collaboration.

Tonnie: Yeah. So, but what I take from it is that you invite people or help people to start seeing more of themselves and more of each other to be more whole person and not only the role of being a CEO of a prison guard or psychologist or whatever. Am I right?

## **Cihan's wish for the future of facilitation: holding space for people to experience a different version of themselves**

Cihan: Yes, I think so. I think now, so every two, three years, I feel like a wish comes to me for my work. And for these two, three years, my sentence is, if I can only have people in our sessions, a moment for them to experience a different version of themselves, it's enough for me. Because also in terms of fractal patterning, I am bringing and all these people are bringing, we're not just meeting for that event, of course. We have our whole lives that we are bringing to that space, to that workshop. And we don't know what we are carrying because it's invisible to our conscious eye. So maybe, you know, our unconscious realms are meeting also at that point while we are in the workshop. Maybe, as you said, interacting, being exposed to each other creates a totally new energy field. And then we go to wiser places maybe from then on. The only thing I can do is put my intention and work on it. I'm in nowhere to guarantee, of course, any outcomes or

No way to guarantee what is best, not to know to see what is best for me or for others. But this is, I think, my calling in terms of levelling where we are. Thank you. I can share like a fantasy dream I have. When we say facilitation, one day, maybe it's a wish for me that the world will understand what I mean. And they will not go and say, what is facilitation? Is it just really giving the microphone to who needs to speak? But they will really understand that it is the holding space, it is the equity, it is the power and privilege practices. It is the also healing, if necessary, it is the potential and wisdom that we all have. So I'm leaving here with this wish. I'll support the New Year.

Tonnie: That's a nice wish. Thank you very much, Cihan.

Cihan: Thank you. Thank you.