

4. Training in Action



4.1 Group life and the training process

4.1.1. Group life in a training

From an educational point of view, people being trained together while very often sharing the same accommodation encourages them to live a unique experience which can support their learning in many ways.

The advantages include:

- Learning together and sharing experiences
- Learning from each other. In peer-group education people share their experience and as positive models can also shape the behaviour and attitudes of their peers.
- A protected learning context in an artificial situation.
- Improving the communication in an organisation when people from one organisation are training together.
- Encountering new people and creating new networks.

This form of residential existence is beneficial for the training process, provided a few guidelines are followed. It is necessary to ensure that all the participants are staying overnight at the same place to enable everybody to participate in the same way. A common problem for trainees at an international event in their city or town is removing themselves from their normal routines and avoiding personal or professional distractions. In terms of optimum participation, it is also important to control the group size and to use a range of methods suited to working with different group sizes. The box below gives a general overview of this point. As we shall see however, no group is static and from the beginning of its existence is developing and in a permanent flow. As with all typologies, the ones offered here can only be verified by the reality of the group you are working with.

Group size and participation

Size	Communication in the group	Group structure/methods
3-6 people:	Everyone speaks	Buzz groups like method 66 (6 people share for 6 minutes about a subject), working groups.
7-10 people:	Almost everyone speaks. Quieter people say less. One or two may not speak at all.	Working groups, small thematic workshops
11-18 people:	5 or 6 people speak a lot, 3 or 4 others join in occasionally.	Workshop, plenary session
19-30 people:	3 or 4 people potentially dominate	Plenary session (presentations (results, film), short theoretical input, evaluations) working groups
30+ people:	Little participation possible	(the bigger the group, the shorter the plenary meetings)

Adapted from Rogers (1989)

4.1.2. Stages of group development

As a basic starting point, each training group is different. Every group is constituted by different individuals, coming from perhaps many different organisations and a range of cultural, social and educational backgrounds. People arrive with their professional and personal expectations,

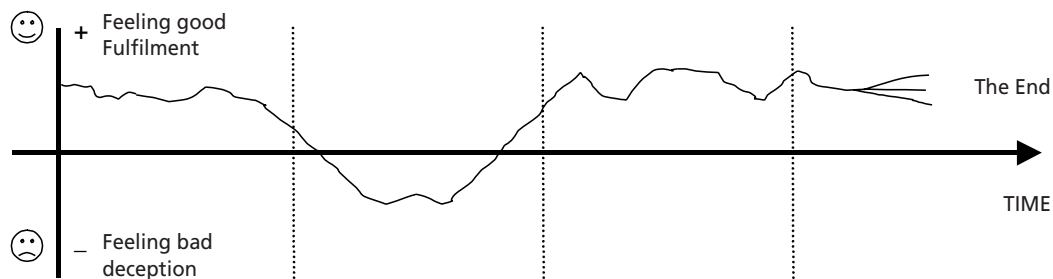


with their values and prejudices, their hidden agendas and their personal luggage which may be packed with more or less important things that keep them connected to their 'normal' world. All or any of these aspects can have a big influence on the group, the training process and the dynamics and evolution of group life. If every group is different, it follows that there are as many group dynamics as there are groups.

That said, models based on the observation of groups argue that there are typical stages of group development which are likely to be passed through. *The T-Kit on Organisational Management* (p.47-) deals with this in relation to team development and details the main stages observable in the development of a training group.

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Typical emotional 'fever curve' and stages of group development in a training



Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Stage 4
Arrival Defreeze Orientation	Fermentation And clearing	Learning/working motivation and productivity	Departure and Transfer (and sometimes mourning)
Participants are nervous and curious, arrive as individuals or subgroups, carrying degrees of personal 'luggage'.	Individuals or subgroups start to know each other, the training frame and the trainers. First power struggles, the roles of the individual participants become defined, sometimes explicit behavioural and communication rules are needed.	Group starts to work on the training subjects, a group 'culture' has been established, participants can be highly motivated and sometimes need to be reined in.	Participants are proud of the learning process and results, they also know that the end of the training is near and that they leave the group to become individuals again which brings mixed emotions.

4.1.3. Theme-Centered Interaction (TCI)

As part of the discussion on training strategies (3.3.1) we considered the Swiss psychologist Ruth Cohn's theory of group and learning processes, Theme-Centered Interaction (TCI) (1981).

Each learning situation can be seen as determined by four factors:

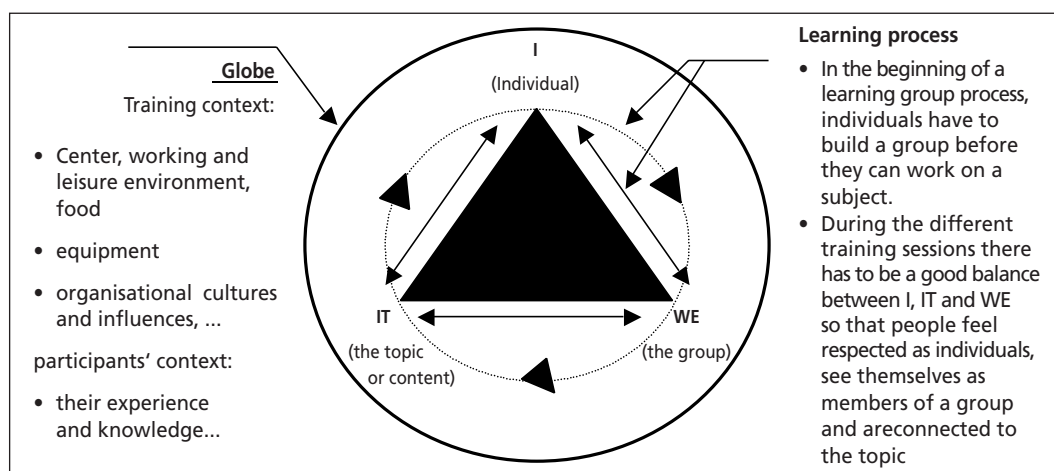
- *I (individual)*: the motivations, interests, personal histories and levels of involvement of the individual participants, as well as the by now infamous luggage they may bring with them. the relationships and cooperation in the group
- *WE (group)*: the relationships, dynamics and types of cooperation within the group.
- *IT (topic)*: the subjects and content of the training.
- *Globe*: the training and organisational environment (also partly represented by the participants)



A crucial goal for the trainer and team is to create a harmony and balance between the individual, the group, the topics explored and the environment in which all of this takes place, while recognising that this balance is dynamic. There is a continuous flow and counter flow from the individual needs to the group needs to the topic to the individual, and onwards.

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The interdependence of the individual participants, the training group, the training subject(s) and the training environment



Adapted from Cohn, 1981

Disturbances result from disjunctures in these relationships; for example if a participant is not well integrated into the group or is not interested in the subject, then this will become obvious in the group life. Treating these relationships as dynamic means realising that priorities can be different at different stages of growth; an obvious example is the need to allow time and space for a group to form before the training subjects can be introduced in depth. 'Balance' is a notion that takes on meaning in relation to each individual group, trainers need to maintain balance by focusing on the neglected aspects of the group and learning process at any one time, while realising that not everything imported into the training environment can or should be dealt with.

In relation to this Cohn provides a set of postulates and rules aimed at improving group interaction and communication which place the emphasis on personal responsibility in inter-relations with and contributions to the group.

Postulates

1. Be your own chairwoman. You are responsible for yourself and your actions in the group. Be aware of your expectations and what you could suggest. Clarify your motivations and don't expect that others will do it for you. Be aware of your own feelings, thoughts and actions.
2. Disturbances take precedence. If you can't follow the learning process because it is too difficult for you or you are tired, bored or angry make it visible to the others. Bear in mind that this does not mean that the trainers' team can deal with anything at any time, or indeed that it should. They must also set their priorities, time management and limits. Note the possibility of a cultural and individual dimension to this postulate: if participants or trainers value harmony or do not wish to lose face, this could make it more difficult for them to express themselves.



Communication rules

3. Talk about yourself; say I instead of we or one.
4. Your questions should include the reasons why you are asking them, it helps avoid an interview replacing group dialogue.
5. Side talks take precedence. Disturbances and not just distractions, they wouldn't happen if they weren't important.
6. Just one person should speak!
7. Be in contact with your thoughts and feelings and select those which are important and supportive: being reflective allows you to find your way between undifferentiated openness and fearful conformity.
8. Be attentive to the body signals (body language) of you and others in the group.
9. Speak about your personal reactions and be careful with interpretations.

Adapted from Cohn (1981)

Rules??

The section above suggests communication rules. For some trainers this makes perfect sense, others recoil from the idea of introducing series of rules to participatory education. Rules of this kind are seldom attempts to implement new laws, but rather to set clear guidelines for common life and conduct within a shared learning process. As with all questions of ethics and group dynamics, there are no ready-made answers to be found here. The following exercise suggests a facilitation method for allowing a group to define its own rules, in this case in relation to communication. An exercise of this kind at the beginning of a training also addresses expectations with regard to the group process and individual contributions. A mutual process allows people to identify themselves with the rules, and reflects key tenets of empowerment by shared responsibility.

Exercise: Communication breakdown

1. In small working groups the participants collect 10 actions/behaviours they judge most contributory to a communication breakdown and visualize them on a sheet.
2. From these possibilities they select the 3 'best' ones in a ranking order. The best one should be represented in a living statue (body sculpture) for presentation in plenary, yet it should not be named. (20-30 minutes)
3. Every group reports on its results and presents the human sculpture. The other participants have to interpret it.
4. From this pool of destructive behaviours, participants and trainers can create a set of rules for group communication and discuss individual commitment to them.
5. Some other issues for discussion in this manner could be:
 - Mutual respect
 - Smoking and non-smoking
 - Alcohol and closing time of the 'bar'.
 - Noise levels in the evening
 - Absence from the training



4.1.4. Managing the training process

Staying connected to the group, the learning process and personal experience is crucial, though it is often difficult to step back in certain situations. The following reflection points are intended as an aid for monitoring the ongoing processes during a training.

General observations

- What is developing in the group? Which of these processes should I leave alone, support or slow down?
- What or whom struck me as needing a closer look during the next session?
- In relation to course objectives and team planning, what changes are necessary to the topic and the methodology?

Focusing on the session

- What is my most intense feeling after this session? How did it develop? What could it mean?
- Which thought occupies me most after this session? What is the connection to the subject and the process? Does it include a new subject?

Focusing on the discussions

- Which interactions were special? Which thoughts and problems appeared and disappeared without being completely developed? What connection is suggested to the next subject or linking introduction?

Focusing on the participants

- Who attracted my special attention? What consideration should I give this? What different relationships do I have with the participants and how is this visible for me? What open or hidden messages have I received and how should I interpret them?

Focusing on the program

It may happen that there is a gap between the logic and flow of the prepared program and the actual needs of the participants in context. If the next topic cannot be just modified, what does the group need next?

- A calm or a meditative element
- Movement/action
- Focus on experiential methods
- Interaction and contact through a game or an exercise
- Time to review the work to date, not the introduction of a new subject
- Activities which connect theory to practice
- A change to another element of the topic, or a new subject.

In-depth focus on the group (for team meetings)

- Which stage of group development are we in now?
- Which participants will be 'easy'?
- Who looks as if they are having difficulties at the moment?
- Who could make contact with me easily, for whom did it seem more difficult?
- Which participants have been 'invisible'?
- What roles have been taken up and allotted? How comfortable do people seem with them?
- What biases and prejudices have I already formed?
- How closely do my/our hypotheses about problems in the group correspond to reality?



To get an instant personal sociogramme of your relationship with the group, the following exercise may be useful:

Put your name in the center of a sheet and the names of the participants around yours. Draw a line from your name to the name of every participant you have had contact with. Use different distances to express the level of connection you have with the different people. Use + and – symbols to express the kind of relationship you have.

Debriefing questions

1. Which names did you forget at first? Why?
2. Whom did you write down first, those far away or those nearby?
3. What will you do with your graph? Will you introduce your findings/suppositions to the group and to your team? How?
4. If you have completed this in several contexts, do any patterns emerge?
5. What can you learn about your behaviour and interaction from this? How can you change it?

4.1.5 Group dynamics and spoken language

Working in an intercultural training environment often means that many participants have to use a foreign language to communicate. Increasingly English is the normal shared medium – the lingua franca, if you'll forgive the irony. Unsurprisingly, this frequently results in native speakers and fluent second language speakers gaining a certain power in the group.

They are more visible and involved than other participants because they can express themselves in a more differentiated ways. This verbal power allows them to take positions in the group others can't inhabit. Sometimes there also is an element of power and position in translating or speaking for participants that don't speak the working language at all (it still happens, even if invitations always demand competency in the working language). Nevertheless, this is the reality of international work, and the issue for trainers is to incorporate linguistic considerations into their methodological planning. The table below outlines the common strategies employed, and some questions to bear in mind in relation to them.

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Communication strategy	Pros	Cons and dangers
One common language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training process is faster (real time) • More spontaneity is possible • Participants (and trainers) are experienced in a holistic way 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-native speakers are often disadvantaged • Be aware of the complacency of a shared language – the same words often have a different meaning or resonance in diverse cultures and linguistic communities. (see also 1.2.3)
Simultaneous interpretation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allows people who don't speak a common language to participate, as long as they are not blocked by the fact that they have to push a button to speak • Communication about technical or more intellectual subjects is made easier • Proceedings are more or less simultaneously received. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Often very expensive • May create an official environment • The headset and microphone installation (even if mobile) limits the scope of the training activities • Interpretation is not an exact science – discrepancies can create misunderstanding and possibly conflict • Spontaneity limited by technology and the interpretation process • Creates an illusion of effortless communication
Consecutive interpretation (in 1 or 2 languages)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More people have the possibility to be involved in the training • People are visible in their own language and non-verbal expressiveness (even if this also requires interpretation!) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Doubling or tripling of the training time • Similar ambiguities of translation, language and culture • A long painstaking process – can deplete the energy of the group • Limits the methodological choice • Less spontaneous for everybody • All verbal visualisation in two or more languages
Mixture of consecutive and simultaneous interpretation and common language groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Combines the positive aspects of the three approaches • Allows a better methodological mix • Allows work in smaller groups, which is not always possible in a simultaneous or consecutive interpretation setting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Needs to be carefully planned with interpreters, who are often engaged solely for simultaneous translation. • It can quickly become unfair for some participants to act as interpreters, detracting from their learning process. Again, this needs careful management.



4.2 Dealing with conflicts

The Italian writer Umberto Eco once remarked that crises themselves are not a problem; it is the way that we react to them that counts. In a way, this is also true of conflicts, and particularly so in a training situation. People from diverse backgrounds and experiences come together to share a committed and often intense period of learning. It would be remarkable if this dynamic didn't produce 'conflict' of one form or another. Indeed, peer education often thrives on the creativity and invention which results from differences, oppositions and clashes. Yet, as a trainer, how do we distinguish between the normal and the destructive? When and how do we intervene? What roles are open to us? The aim of this brief section is to suggest ways of analysing conflict situations, and deciding how to approach them.

We could start with a fundamental question; *when is a conflict a conflict?* Defining human situations is always tricky, and especially so here. At a basic level, a conflict involves opposing parties, and different combinations of needs, aims, strategies, motivations and interests. Perhaps of more use to the trainer than a rigid definition is a sense of when a conflict has shifted from being a normal, and perhaps energising process, to a potentially destructive one. Like its potential solutions, the definition of a conflict must come from those involved. Yet the trainer may also have to decide whether or not a situation needs to be declared as a conflict, and addressed by the team and the parties involved. This demands careful analysis, beginning with looking at the type of conflict which is unfolding, and the motivations for involvement.

4.2.1 Types of conflict

While a conflict involves two or more opposing parties, their levels of involvement may be very different, and these levels of involvement are intimately related to the reasons for the conflict. In *Community Conflict Skills*, Mari Fitzduff identifies possible types of conflict, listed below. In a wide variety of international trainings with political and social themes, these different levels of conflict may be present simultaneously, and different manifestations may emerge as the situation intensifies or changes.

- *Intra-personal*: during an intense process, we may often encounter internal conflict about our behaviour, values, ideas. This in turn may inform our involvement in external disagreements.
- *Inter-personal*: conflict between personalities. Despite the energy spent on group building, there is no rule or guarantee that participants should like each other, and this is a normal state of affairs. Sometimes, however, individual animosity can have a negative group effect.
- *Inter-role*: in a training, people play formal and informal roles in relation to each other. The assignment or adoption of these roles can be a source of friction.
- *Inter-group/organisational*: conflict which occurs between groups or between individuals as representatives of those groups., for example, between members of opposed political youth organisations.
- *Inter-community*: again, between groups or representatives of those groups that can be defined as communities, be it ethnic, religious, political, and so forth.
- *Inter-national*: conflicts between nations which, like inter-community situations, may motivate citizens of those nations present at a training to engage in conflict.

4.2.2 Why do conflicts occur?

Clearly, no two conflicts are ever the same, but we can attempt to group the kinds of motivations which are likely to be present. At a very fundamental level, we could argue that conflict arises from people's *needs* and *desires*, which may often be incompatible and therefore in conflict. Needs can range from questions of material survival and subsistence, to those of security and comfort, to issues of identity and self-worth. Unless the food is really medieval, it may be safe to assume that primary needs will not motivate conflict in a training seminar. In an intercultural group dynamic, it is also safe to assume that any of the other socio-psychological needs may arise. Closely related to these kinds of needs are people's *values*, the guidelines by which they live their lives and interact socially with others. A training offers multiple situations where values may come into opposition, suggesting that a key role of the trainer is to facilitate a safe forum for the potentially valuable exchanges that may result. Yet what happens if values are so deeply held that exchange and compromise becomes impossible, and parties insist that theirs should predominate?



To complicate matters further, needs and values are not always visible and declared. If we dust off the beloved youth work iceberg one more time, we could put it that needs and values lie under the waterline, while *positions* are what are visible as the conflict is played out. That is, a position is the way that people have chosen to defend or attempt to obtain their needs. The position may be motivated by the needs, as yet unspoken, but may only be expressed in relation to the focus of the conflict and the issue that is in the group domain. [For a further discussion of the concept of needs, you could refer to the *Organisational Management T-Kit*, pp 48-51]. It is not surprising that conflict parties rarely voice their needs or interests directly. The dynamics of a conflict demand the adoption of positions; these can be defended. Needs, particularly emotional or personal ones, may be interpreted as displaying weakness in a charged situation, or it may be more strategic to keep them hidden. Needs are not always easily articulated – people may not have a clear focus on their needs, and may have become so concentrated on strengthening their position that the needs involved become more obscured.

To illustrate this, let's consider the circle below. This resource is based on the widely-held premise in conflict transformation theories that groups and individuals must be persuaded to move from an exchange of positions or possible solutions to an analysis of the needs themselves. Solutions are often phrased as if they were needs; "I want him to stop interrupting me in the workshop". The need is to be respected, and there may be many solutions possible to meet that need. By addressing the underlying reasons, a process of conflict transformation has begun.

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Mapping

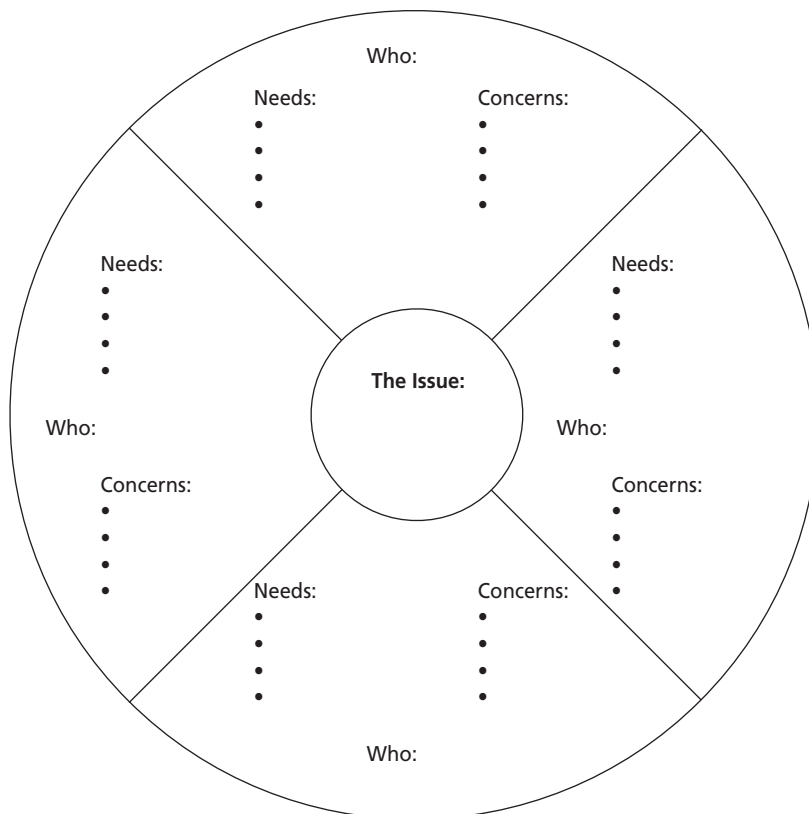
In the centre circle, define briefly the issue, the problem area, or conflict in neutral terms that all would agree on and that doesn't invite a "yes / no" answer e.g. "Filing", and not "Should Sal do filing?"

In the sectors of the large circle, write the name of each important person or group.

Write down each person's or group's needs. What motivates him / her?

Write down each person's or group's concerns, fears or anxieties.

Be prepared to change the statement of the issue, as your understanding of it evolves through discussion or to draw up other maps of related issues that arise.



"Conflict Mapping" by The Conflict Resolution Network, Australia.

In the diagram, the term *concerns* is used in the same sense as *positions* in the above discussion.



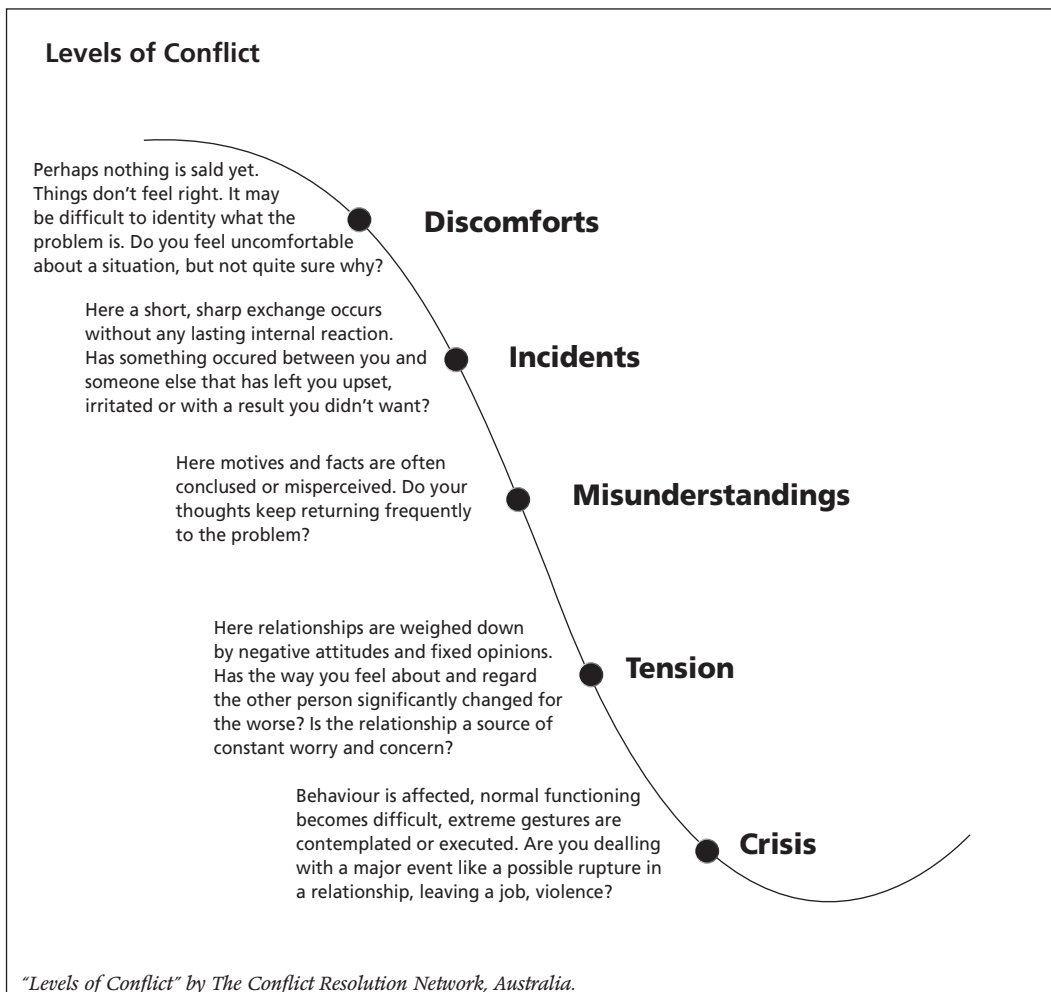
Suggestions for Training:

Use the mapping diagram* for personal reflection on a conflict you have been involved in during a training, perhaps one with no satisfactory resolution. Give careful consideration as to how far you can presume to 'know' the needs of others. Having analysed the conflict within this form, would you have attempted different solutions? Why?

4.2.3 Conflict Escalation

Each conflict has a history; it has developed from somewhere. In the chart (insert here *levels of conflict*, the Conflict Resolution Network) it is evident that the crisis point may not emerge immediately. This may not always be the case, but within the dynamics of a seminar it is quite possible that highly charged incidents act as a release for tensions which have been building in a number of ways, over time. The longer these factors go unnoticed, the more difficult they become to solve. In the same way, if the conflict itself remains unaddressed, then the danger is that positions become more entrenched, opposing stereotypes become hardened, and meaningful communication becomes difficult. This is complicated by the ambiguity of communication in a multicultural environment, where both group and individuals are still negotiating the forms and values of communication.

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4.2.4 Ways out of conflict

The area of conflict studies is loaded with terminology; is a conflict resolved or transformed? What does it mean to manage or intervene? A vast range of theoretical models for engagement with conflicts exist, to be chosen in relation to the kind of analysis we have undertaken above. We have space here only to outline possibilities open to the trainer, and to suggest resources for further study.

Negotiation

An important point to bear in mind is that a conflict can only be resolved by those involved. Arbitration (a solution imposed by an agreed third party) is rarely completely satisfactory, and ill-suited to the peer philosophy of youth education. Negotiation, on the other hand, allows all parties to define the situation in which they find themselves, and to build solutions built on an open analysis of the needs involved. That said, negotiation is also open to manipulation, depending on the strategies employed by the people involved. *Concession-making*, for example, while necessary, may allow for agreement without addressing the underlying needs in a sustainable fashion. Given the bi-polar nature of negotiation, it can also lead to the hardening of basic positions, if a process of *contention* is allowed to develop. Currently, there is an influential body of work advocating the idea of a *win\win approach*; a philosophy and practice of joint-problem solving that attempts to help both parties to achieve their goals. Central to this strategy is a combination of moving from positions to needs, *active listening*, and creatively designing options that can be pursued. What this move from positions to needs also involves is a fundamental focus on the conflict, rather than opposing actors, as the problem. This is easily said, however, as a crucial and unpredictable factor in conflict is emotion, and the trainer involved in a conflict with a team member or participant may find it difficult to implement a careful negotiation strategy while managing their own emotions and dealing with the anger and insecurity which surrounds them. That is why negotiation is often accompanied or superseded by:

Mediation

Mediation involves the use of a third-party to aid agreement and facilitate the process of conflict resolution. An appropriate metaphor is that of the mid-wife, easing the birth of something that the mediator did not create. She is not the fire service, arriving to solve the problem. Instead, mediation involves decision-enabling, and is a skilled process demanding experience and reflexivity. According to the Mediation Network for Northern Ireland, the key functions of mediation are:

- To facilitate communication
- To improve understanding
- To support creative thinking
- To explore accommodations

Given the often intimate nature of a training, one of the challenges of mediation is communicating neutrality and fairness. Trainers may be called upon to perform what Pruitt and Carnevale have called *emergent mediation*; that is, mediation where the mediator has an ongoing relationship with those in conflict, and is involved in the context of the dispute (1997:167). Therefore the mediator also has a history in relation to the conflict, and is not operating within a formal system of mediation. Guidelines and principles of the process must then be agreed, and consistently applied by the trainer as mediator. Where this question of intertwined histories is important is in relation to the notion of bias. Clearly, biased mediation is as useful, or even less so, than openly taking sides in a dispute. Equally, objectivity is a fiction, in this kind of context the trainer may have views and opinions on the matter being negotiated. Clear guidelines can facilitate an impartial process, but in facilitating this process it could be argued that the mediator needs to be transparent concerning their understanding of the problem. This allows the conflict participants to build a more complete picture of the process, and minimise the possibility of distrust.



4.2.5 Using TCI in conflict analysis

The TCI model, outlined in 4.1.3, can be used to identify the reasons for a range of conflicts that may emerge in a training situation. As the model advocates achieving balance between the needs of individuals, the group and the topic, recognising imbalances may indicate the roots of certain problems. For instance, a so-called 'difficult' participant, disruptive to the training process, might not feel part of the group, or is a member of a (cultural) subgroup which is not integrated. She may feel that she has not had enough time to introduce herself or build up trust towards the group. Disturbance could also be a sign that this participant doesn't like the subject, the methods used or that the process is too fast for her. In any case, this suggests that a transformation strategy would be to intervene on the level where the imbalance exists. Equally, the emphasis of this model on process allows us to focus on relationships and power within the groups, and not just on the issues which form the catalyst and fuel for the conflict. The chart below details some conflicts which may emerge, and the relevant TCI factors. The data is based on our observations, and serves solely as an illustration

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Conflicts as a result of imbalances in the training relationships

	Individual	Group	Topic
Individual		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Individual or cultural subgroup is not integrated 	
Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conflict among individuals in the group 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Group doesn't like/value the topic or the methods employed
Topic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Subject not yet finished Individual doesn't like theme 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Group work is under-developed Sessions too long Inappropriate methods 	
Globe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Personal 'baggage' Negative personal experiences Internalized organisational values or taboos 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Different organisational or cultural understandings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Poor preparation by the sending organisation(s) about the topic Differing expectations Training environment effects the work

4.2.6 Developing personal practice

In common with the general philosophy of this T-Kit, it is worth emphasising that conflict transformation practices are not custom made. Even well-researched and elaborate strategies for intervention must be carefully analysed and adapted in relation to the situation at hand. A big heart and well-meaning action are not enough; conflicts can quickly destabilise a group process, and dealing with them demands the same levels of preparation as any other factor in a training. Inherent in this preparation is the reflexiveness and the confidence of the trainer in relation to their intervention. The trainer as mediator needs to look at how they get in, what is expected of them, what they feel they can deliver, and how they can get out if the situation is beyond them. An emergent conflict must be taken seriously, even if it is not evaluated as being so from the outside. Important to remember also is that not every conflict can be solved, perhaps we can only aim to limit the damage to the overall situation. The resources described in **Appendix 5** are interesting places to start building an understanding of conflict dynamics, and to consider strategies for dealing with conflicts that are suited to your skills and competencies as a trainer.