PAPER 25

Management of conflict

Bob Dick (1987) *The management of conflict: a systematic approach to team building and mediated and unmediated conflict resolution*. Chapel Hill: Interchange (mimeo).

A 1987 revision of a 1981 paper, written to support workshops in conflict management. More details of the paper's provenance are given in the preface. Some of the references to earlier documents have been updated

Preface

This document [1] describes fairly robust (or "do-it-yourself") versions of team-building and conflict resolution. The robustness comes from a number of sources. One is the use of some techniques which keep the problem small and containable. A second is the use of a number of detailed procedures and

1. This is a living document which is often revised, and portions of which have appeared in other documents and handouts.

frameworks which makes it easier for a mediator to keep on track. An explicit problem-solving approach is used, which increases many users' acceptance of the method. A third is the inclusion of simple communication skills training (for mediator, or those in conflict, or both) as part of the approach.

Perhaps the most important source of its robustness is the use of a procedure which more nearly resembles role negotiation than conflict resolution. This is made possible by the use of criteria to decide what information needs to be exchanged. Thus a typical session might begin as role negotiation. When the need arises, it might then become more of a relationship-oriented team building session by the addition of the extra relevant information. For more complex issues, it might respond by becoming something quite similar to the approach described by Chris Argyris in some of his writing. In this third form, it is characterised by the inclusion of information about beliefs, not given specific attention in many approaches.

Most elements of the system, and the communication skills which form part of it, are supported by practical and intuitively-satisfying conceptual models. The more experienced user can therefore amend the procedures to use her [I use feminine gender throughout to refer to either sex] own skills and preferred style.

As you might imagine, there are advantages in having a technique which starts with role negotiation but which can move easily into conflict resolution when that is useful. The technique also uses a combination of consensus and negotiation. Consensus is more powerful when it can be used. Negotiation has wider applicability. The use of both gains the advantages of both.

The document begins with a thumbnail sketch of the approach. Then follow the major sections on communication skills, mediation (conflict resolution with a third party), and unmediated conflict resolution (when the person conducting the conflict resolution is one of the parties to the conflict). Later parts of the document address such issues as preventive measures using organisational restructuring, and use of the technique as part of a team building programme. A final section discusses how the technique can be varied to suit the user.

I wrote the document for three main types of reader. My central intention was to describe material which could be used to help train intending consultants and trainers. I required such material for my teaching at the University of Queensland and elsewhere. I have also included procedures which can be used by experienced consultants and trainers to extend their skills in the areas of teambuilding and conflict management. It is also my hope that the material will be used by other people to maintain and enrich the relationships that are important to them — this might include parents, managers, and members of community groups.

The present approach owes much to those people I have worked with in the past. These include managers and other people from consulting assignments, and people who have studied conflict resolution with me in university courses and elsewhere. I thank them for this.

An early version of part of this document appeared in May 1981. I prepared it for the Association for Gifted and Talented Children, for whom I ran some workshops on parent-teenager conflict resolution. The paper was titled *Parents: how to live more-or-less happily with a teenager, or Teenagers: how to live more-or-less happily with a parent*. It focussed on mediated and unmediated conflict resolution. This paper was revised into something more closely resembling its present form in 1983, under the title *The management of conflict* (unpublished mimeo, Department of Psychology, University of Queensland, 1983), for distribution at the Melbourne OD Networks conference *Seminar '83*.

The ideas on mediated conflict resolution were further developed for a skills teaching workbook *Communication skills workbook* (University of Queensland, Department of Psychology, 1983, 1984). I thank Cindy Gallois, Joe McDowall and Debbie Twinn for their help in developing it. This has since been revised and reissued as a joint Interchange and University Bookshop publication under the title *Learning to communicate* (1986; available from the University of Queensland Bookshop).

I owe too much to too many other people to mention them all. Some of my many other debts have been acknowledged in earlier documents. I would like, however, to single out my fellow member of the Centre of Applied Behavioural Science: George Blackgrove, John Damm, Phil Hanford, Hollis Peter, and Garth Peters.

Many of the ideas on structure were developed in conversation with Dexter Dunphy, when I helped him to prepare the book *Organisational change by choice* (McGraw-Hill Australia, 1981.)

The approach to team building is based on some work I did with local organisations beginning in the mid 1970's. An earlier form was described in the paper *Team building: Face to face communication and some procedures for improving it* (Unpublished mimeo, Institutions of Engineers, Australia, Queensland Division, 1977). It has also benefitted from talks with Rob Skerman, who used it as a basis for his internal Public Service Board document *A manager's guide to teambuilding: A role negotiation model* (Unpublished mimeo, Metropolitan Hospitals Board, undated). I was also influenced by conversations I had with Jim Hirsch of Department of Primary Industry, who has used his own role-based procedures within that organisation.

My ideas of problem solving have developed simultaneously with those on communication skills. They were helped to take firmer shape in the course of preparing (with Hollis Peter) a workbook for the Department of Employment and Industrial Relations, Implementing participative personnel practices (Department of Employment and Industrial Relations, 1985). This addresses the design and redesign of personnel practices using a set of techniques for participative management of change.

The categorisation into first and second person skills I owe to Paul Donovan, until recently with the Australian Institute of Management in Brisbane. Many people have helped me develop this system. The appropriate acknowledgments are given in my monograph Communication skills (Organisational Studies Unit, University of Queensland, 1979), available from the Department of Management at the University, perhaps to be revised during 1987 or 1988. The overall approach is described in greater detail, and with many practice exercises, in Learning to communicate, already mentioned.

It is also a pleasure to acknowledge the help I have received over many years from those colleagues I have joined on consulting assignments. In most areas of participative consulting, practice leads theory. The most up to date methods are to be discovered by talking to practitioners, not by reading what they write. I value the many conversations I have had with these colleagues.

It is my intention to continue to develop, extend and refine the procedures and this description of them. Any comments on the techniques or this document will help me in this task. I would therefore be glad to hear of your reactions and experience if you use any of the techniques or models or procedures.

Contents

Introduction

Conflict is an unavoidable part of social and organisational life. It can only be avoided if we avoid human contact. And to do that is to be less than human.

The problem lies not in the conflict itself but in our usual response to it. At first we ignore its existence, and when that fails we respond aggressively. Flight or fight. If it is a recurring conflict, both of these responses make it worse.

The constructive alternative is to acknowledge its presence and deal with it in a problem solving manner. Conflict then becomes a means of improving relationships and effectiveness. This document describes how that can be done. It begins by examining the nature and origins of conflict, and then describes the basic skills and techniques which can be applied to resolve or prevent it. [1]

Conflict

Some element of conflict is to be found in almost all relationships. It is common because the conditions for its emergence are usually present. It requires only three conditions to be met.

- one or more of a number of people depend on the other(s) for their effectiveness or satisfaction;
- the interdependence exists within a continuing relationship; and
- there is some barrier to free communication.

The interdependence creates a need to communicate. The barrier prevents adequate communication. In other words ...

interdependence + barrier = friction

In an ongoing relationship the friction continues to accumulate until it eventually becomes conflict.

This is not to say that the conflict is always serious, or obvious. Sometimes it is too trivial to be worth the trouble of resolving it. And many conflicts remain covert. People often prefer to ignore them rather than take the risk of bringing them into the open.

Whatever the nature of the social system (family, club, organisation, circle of friends) some barriers will exist. For example they may be ...

- physical, where the people live in different houses or are otherwise geographically separated;
- temporal, perhaps due to people working different shifts;
- arising from a difference in values; a common example is the generation gap that may exist between older and younger managers or between parents and teenagers;
- due to differences in status, for example between older and younger children.

Within formal social systems even more barriers arise. To those already listed can be added ...

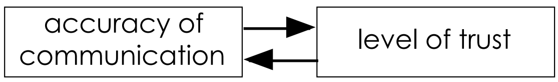
- structural, where each person is in a different part of the organisation with different goals;
- due to differences in power, as between boss and subordinate;
- arising because interdependencies are uneven, such as where there is a one-way work flow.

These are intended only as examples. There are many others.

We often structure our social systems in ways that increase the potential for conflict. The structures we use are not those that maximise contact between those with the greatest need to communicate. They are instead the structures that simplify the control of organisations and the like by managers and others in authority. The result is often to separate colleague from colleague, section from section, and function from function.

So the friction accumulates. The increasing friction creates a greater need for communication. At the same time it may reduce the willingness. In time, mistrust may develop as an additional and important barrier which may eventually become so severe that the people are unable to communicate. And without communication the conflict cannot be resolved.

Trust and communication are related in such a way that an improvement in one will lead to an improvement in the other. This then feeds back to increase the first still more. And so the cycle continues.



Until there is some trust, those in dispute are unable to communicate openly or to understand each other. Until there is communication, trust cannot be improved.

If conflict is to be resolved, those involved require some minimal level of problem solving and communication skills. They also need to be able to use an approach that applies these skills to defining the issues and dealing with them. These are the topics to be covered below. First, basic problem solving and communication skills are addressed. Techniques for conflict management are then described.

Problem solving

The essentials of problem solving are quite straightforward. For technical problems the basic steps are ...

1. Define the problem
2. Collect the appropriate information
3. Analyse the problem
4. Define appropriate solutions, and choose one
5. Implement the solution
6. Follow up to remedy any shortcomings

This is the approach we use in those areas where we claim professional expertise. Cooks use it for cookery problems. Engineers use it for engineering problems. Doctors use it for medical problems.

There are, however, three broad categories of problems. This approach is adequate for only one of them.

The three types of problem are ...

- Those with a single technical cause. [2] They can be resolved when the cause is identified and removed or countered. They can be described as one-right-answer problems, and can be resolved using rational problem solving techniques.
- Those where there are multiple, interacting causes. For such problems, there may be many remedies. These can be described as many-right-answer problems.
- Those where questions of ethics and values are foremost, and where the presence of different beliefs about what is right may prevent a resolution. They may be described as no-right-answer problems.

2. Such problems can be worked on using techniques such as those described in Kepner and Tregoe, *The rational manager*, Tata McGraw-Hill, 1954. My own ideas of problem solving have developed simultaneously with those on communication skills. They took firmer shape in the course of preparing (with Hollis Peter) a workbook for the Department of Science and Technology, *Implementing participative personnel practices*, Australian Government Publishing Service, 1984, which applies to the design and redesign of personnel practices a set of techniques for participative management of change.

People problems, including conflict problems, are usually some combination of all three types. Of the three types, many right-answer problems tend to form the predominant part of the mix.

In such instances the particular solution chosen may be less important than the method of problem solving used. It is such problems that techniques for conflict management must deal with.

There are few differences between one-right-answer problem solving techniques and those intended for people problems. They have in common that solutions are based on information, and are developed only after the information is adequately analysed and understood. The main difference is this: In resolving many-right-answer and no-right-answer problems, it is often essential that the people involved agree with the solution. Agreement is often best obtained by involving the people in the problem solving.

A second difference is in the nature of the relevant information. The resolution of technical problems depends mostly on technical information. Information relevant to people problems often includes information about beliefs and emotions. It is often hard to obtain, and hard to understand even when it is obtained. For that matter it is frequently disbelieved even when it is understood. Communication skills are therefore also needed for conflict management.

Communication

If it is information which is to be communicated, it is important to know what information is relevant. [3]

Imagine two people within a close relationship. Of the two, consider who is most likely to have accurate information about each person's behaviour, each person's beliefs, and each person's feelings.

We can see another person's behaviour more clearly than our own. Among other things, our eyes are better placed for observing others than for observing ourselves. We judge ourselves more by our intentions than by our behaviour. This is why it is often such a surprise to see ourselves on videotape for the first time.

We cannot see each other's feelings directly, but deduce them from the behaviour we see. We are able to sense our own feelings directly (though we may often fail to do so).

Similarly, we can be aware of our own beliefs. We must depend on other people's report to know their thoughts, or again deduce them from behaviour.

Again consider two people in a close relationship. For convenience call them **A** and **B**. Each of them has direct access to certain types of information—about the other's behaviour, and about her own feelings and beliefs.

A	**B**
B's behaviour and other specifics	A's behaviour and other specifics
A's feelings	B's feelings
A's thoughts	B's thoughts

The goal of conflict management is to reduce the conflict and improve the relationship using problem solving methods. In most instances, all of the information is relevant: behaviour, feelings and thoughts. Each person has access to some of this information. Successful problem solving can only occur when both people understand and accept both sets of information and base their decisions on it.

3. The categorisation into first and second person skills I owe to Paul Donovan, until recently with the Australian Institute of Management in Brisbane. Many people have helped me develop this system. The appropriate acknowledgments are given in my monograph Communication skills, Organisational Studies Unit, University of Queensland, 1979. The overall approach is described in greater detail, and with many practice exercises, in *Learning to communicate*, Interchange and University of Queensland Bookshop, 1986 (which also appeared under the earlier title of *Communication skills workbook*).

Suppose I wish to improve a relationship I have with someone. Using this scheme, I can now classify the relevant communication skills into three varieties.

- *First person skills* are expressive skills. They are the skills I need to convey the information I possess to others. That is, I can use first person skills to convey to others the relevant information about their behaviour, and my beliefs and feelings.
- *Second person skills* are skills for listening and understanding. They are the skills I need to obtain the information that others have. That is, I can use them to obtain from others the relevant information about my behaviour, and their beliefs and feelings.
- *Third person skills* are skills for managing the overall process. They are the skills needed to determine which information is needed. I can use them to decide which information to give or get, mine or others'. They are also for choosing between the different types of information, about behaviour, beliefs or feelings.

The three types of communication skill are described in a little more detail below. It is hard using the written word to describe the aspects of communication other than the words. The nonverbal aspects are, however, extremely important. No matter what words we use, how those words are said may determine what the listener makes of them. Attitudes in particular are likely to be judged more from nonverbal than from verbal behaviour.

These non-verbal aspects of communication will be addressed first.

Non-verbal expression

As already mentioned, factual information is often deduced from the words used. Attitudinal information is more often assumed from the nonverbal aspects. These include the characteristics of a person's speech such as tone of voice, pace, pauses, inflection, volume, timbre and the like. They also include facial expression, direction of gaze, posture, gestures, nearness, and so on.

Whether we are consciously aware of it or not, we base our judgment of another person's genuineness on the amount of agreement between what their words say and what the rest of their body says. The simplest way to handle the non-verbal aspects of expression, therefore, is to be honest. For most of us, the nonverbal aspects will then look after themselves.

The implication of the preceding paragraph is that the approach used here is intended for use by normal people. A few people have marked deficits in their nonverbal expression. More specialised remedial work may be necessary for such people before the approaches described here will be completely effective.

Nonverbal aspects of communication are usually sent and received outside of conscious awareness. In understanding other people's feelings, however, there are some overall patterns which can be used. Large-silhouette postures, advancing gestures, threatening facial expression, loud volume, glaring eye contact together indicate aggression. Small-silhouette postures, retiring gestures, troubled facial expression, low volume, avoidance of eye contact together indicate appeasement or withdrawal.

Non-defensive tone of voice, posture and gesture tend to be intermediate between the two patterns just listed—see the table.

Appeasing	Non-defensive	Aggressive
Small-silhouette posture	Normalposture	Large-silhouette posture
Retiring gestures	Gestures in plane of body	Advancing gestures
Soft, gentle tone of voice	Firm but pleasant tone of voice	Harsh, demanding tone of voice
Apprehensive expression	Normal expression	Angryexpression
Minimal eye contact	Frequent eye contact	Glaring eye contact

Aggression and appeasement are both defensive. Both therefore encourage defensiveness in the other person. You may use the methods described in this document to develop more honest relationships with people. If so, you may become aware of some habitual postures or gestures that others interpret as defensive. You can then deliberately avoid these behaviours.

(Whether you intend these gestures as defensive is not the issue. Whatever your intentions, some nonverbal behaviour is likely to be interpreted as defensive. If so, it is usually simpler to avoid it.)

Non-verbal aspects of communication are important in all three types of communication skill.

First person skills

These are the simplest skills. I can use them to convey to another person the information to which I have access. I do this in three stages.

- First I get the other person's attention;
- then I convey the information to her;
- then I check her understanding.

I can put together the necessary information by asking myself these questions.

- What precisely does she do or say?
- What are the material consequences for me of this behaviour?
- If relevant, what do I assume she is trying to accomplish with this behaviour?
- If relevant, what do I then feel like doing in response (that is, what is my emotional response)?
- If relevant, how do I act in response?

This information will be easier to understand if I convey it very specifically, and not defensively. It helps if I avoid blaming, criticising, interpreting, or making demands on the other person.

It is also an advantage to convey as much as possible of this information by describing specific actions and things. This is information which another person can most easily verify.

For example ...

> *"When you do/say ...* (i.e. the other's behaviour)*, ... then I am obliged to do or prevented from doing ...* (i.e. the material consequences for me) *..."*

If relevant, I can also add the information on my beliefs and feelings.

> *"I assume you are trying to do ...* (i.e. my beliefs about the other's motives) *... I feel like doing ...* (i.e. my emotional response) *... and I actually ..."* (my actual response)

Second person skills

The easiest way of describing second person skills is as the skills needed to help the other person make a first-person statement.

Second person skills are a little harder than first person skills. One reason for this is that there are more components. To display good second person skills, I ...

- **Listen**. Give the other person my undivided attention as I try to understand what the problem looks like from her point of view.
- **Acknowledge**. Let the other person know just what I have understood her to say.
- **Check**. Make sure that I understand her, by making it as easy as possible for her to amend or add to my understanding.
- **Enquire**. Ask the questions that will help the other person to change her first answer (which probably avoids the issue, or blames, or demands) into one which gives specific information about what I have done or said, or about what she wants me to say or do.

Of these, acknowledgment is by far the most important. If it is done well, and often, the rest of the communication process is much more likely to be effective.

The form these skills take depends on two things. One is how complex the problem is. The other is how upset the other person is, and how strong her beliefs are. But in general, a second person response ...

- begins by acknowledging what has already been said;
- and then agrees with what is specific and true;
- and then perhaps enquires for more information.

An example.

> *"As I understand you, you are saying ... I do sometimes ..., and I can now see why it appears to you that ... Could you give me a specific example?"*

It is unlikely that the other person will use good first person skills. Instead she is likely to make assumptions, cast blame, and make demands. The best way of responding will depend on the circumstances. For many issues, five distinct stages can be identified.

1. **Visible emotion**. The other person is very upset. In this instance I need only convey and check my understanding. Enquiry is seldom needed, and in fact is usually better avoided. ("*It looks as if ... / It seems that ... / Are you saying ...*")
2. **Loaded words**. The person is no longer visibly upset. But the use of loaded words such as *good*, *loyal*, *should*, *right* and the like (words that have little meaning and heavy connotations) shows that there are deeper issues still not addressed. In this instance, I can acknowledge the person's beliefs (which are probably an important part of the unspoken background), and ask for more information. Enquiry may be used cautiously, but is usually still better avoided. ("*It sounds as if you believe I've done something I shouldn't.*")
3. **Vague words**. The person is no longer very upset, but is still talking in vague or general terms. To respond to this, I acknowledge that she has good reason for thinking as she does. At this stage, I will also find enquiry useful. I can get more specific information, perhaps by asking for exam-

ples. In particular I can try to narrow down the conversation to a specific instance or example (*"I understand that ...; in what way do I ...? Can you give me an example ...?"*)

4. **Concrete detail**. The other person is specific in what she says, though there is still missing information. Now, I can agree with what is true, and get more information about the rest. (*"That's quite true, I do ...; what else is there ...?"*)
5. **Complete information**. Now and only now can I safely attempt a resolution. I can do this by offering a solution to the problem, or by inviting the other person to do so. (*"I think I now understand your position completely. When I do ..., then this causes you to ... . Is that right? What could I do that would resolve the difficulty for you?"*)

Third person skills

Third person skills are the skills I need to decide whose concerns to work on and what sort of information to exchange. In other words, third person skills are about choosing priorities—deciding what can most usefully be tackled first or next.

Before a mutual concern (or one which is an issue only for me) can be worked on, there may be other issues that need to be got out of the way.

- A *process* issue is given highest priority of all. Anything that prevents the real issue being addressed counts as a process issue. It is therefore a special type of first person issue. If unresolved, process issues prevent any other concerns being addressed effectively.
- The other person's concerns are usually best given next highest priority. Such concerns are usually identified by some wish on the other person's part to change my behaviour. The other person is more likely to give attention to my concerns, or to mutual concerns, if her own concerns are first addressed and resolved.

- A mutual concern is often the main object of the exercise. Despite this, it is usually more effective to deal first with process issues and second person concerns. But mutual concerns take priority over my own concerns.
- Last in priority are my own concerns. These can usually wait until other issues have been resolved. They are usually more easily resolved when the other person has no concerns of her own.

Similarly, there are priorities about the type of information to be exchanged.

- The aim is to produce satisfactory future outcomes for all.
- But these future outcomes are obtained because of the present decisions we make. Decisions are therefore a higher priority than outcomes. This is so even though the outcomes are the purpose of the exercise.
- Effective decisions depend in turn on the appropriate information having been exchanged and understood and believed. Information therefore takes priority over decision making.
- Strong feelings prevent understanding. Their resolution is a higher priority than is the exchange of information.
- Feelings have many different sources. Some arise directly from the present process, and disappear when process issues are resolved. Others can be understood only when the underlying beliefs have also been understood. Beliefs are therefore given the highest priority.

This second set of priorities can be remembered as FIDO, shown below.

FIDO is not intended to be a description of the stages of communication. It is instead a set of priorities. In more detail, it can be used to determine the appropriate information to be used in problem solving. In the event of difficulty at any level, attention is given to the higher priority level.

For example, imagine that you are having difficulty achieving the end results (the outcomes) that were agreed to. The model would indicate that revising the decisions might be the most appropriate action. If decisions are not being made effectively, perhaps important information has been overlooked or misunderstood. If information is being ignored, perhaps feelings are getting in the way.

Feelings *which are*

- positive to self, outcomes, process, others
- and not strongly negative to anything

allow the interchange and understanding of

Information *which if*

- specific, adequate, accurate, relevant, and
- understood and accepted as valid by all

helps those present to make more effective

Decisions *If these*

- have the commitment of those affected
- specify who will do what, by when, and
- include monitoring and coordination

then the desired

Outcomes are more likely to be realised

Priorities in decision making

Exchanging information

This is now sufficient background to allow the techniques for improving relationships to be addressed. To do this, I will first describe an approach which can be used by some appropriate third person to help two other people improve their relationship.

I begin with a description of the process which lies at the heart of all the techniques described later. It is a process which ensures that information is exchanged and understood. Later application of the process include mediation (sometimes known as third party conflict resolution), unmediated conflict resolution, role negotiation, and teambuilding.

If two people are excellent communicators, and use their skills well, then information is easily exchanged. One person will convey the information in such a way that it is easy to understand. This other will listen well, and will check that she has understood. The communication skills already described will help two people do this.

In many instances it cannot be assumed that the two people have sufficiently good communication skills for this to happen. The use of a suitable process can then further improve the exchange of information.

I presume you agree that communication is more effective if only one person speaks at a time. I further presume you also agree that effective communication has only taken place when the second person understands the intended message.

In other words, effective communicators are likely to alternate between speaking clearly and without defensiveness, and listening to understand what the other person is saying. The two people will therefore exchange roles often, between speaker and listener ...

A speaks → **B** listens

A listens ← **B** speaks

A speaks → **B** listens

and so on. This can be achieved to some extent if A and B agree to use a process which switches them between the two roles of speaker and listener.

Clearly, any process is likely to work more effectively if the two people are good communicators. Some preliminary training in communication skills can therefore be a useful strategy.

Sometimes this cannot be done, for example because of lack of time, or because the two people are unwilling. A suitable process may then be able to compensate for the lack of communication skills.

To do so a process may useful set out to accomplish at least four things.

- As already mentioned, have the two people alternate in the roles of speaker and listener.
- Confine speakers to information which is validly theirs to give. Such information includes the other person's behaviour, the consequences for the speaker, and the speaker's feelings and beliefs.
- Encourage speakers to behave as if they had good first person skills. In particular, help speakers to wait until they have the other person's undivided attention, and then give their information specifically and without blame or demand.
- Encourage listeners to behave as if they had good second person skills—giving the other person one hundred per cent of their attention, listening to understand what the other person is saying, and then acknowledging what they understand the other person to have said.

The following process structures the exchange of information in such a way that these conditions are more likely to be achieved.

- **A** non-defensively describes the other person's behaviour and the consequences for herself. If relevant she also adds information about her own beliefs, feelings, and response.

  While she does so, **B** listens to try to understand what it is like for **A**. **B** then ...

  - asks questions, but only to clarify her understanding;
  - restates what **A** has said, but in her own words, to **A**'s satisfaction.
- **B** then responds, specifically and non-defensively, with information about **A**'s behaviour and the consequences for herself. She adds, if relevant, information about her own beliefs and feelings.

While she does so, **A** listens to try to understand what it is like for **B**. **A** then ...

  - asks questions for clarification;

   - then restates what B has said in her own words, to B's satisfaction.
- A then responds ...

and so on until all the information is identified, conveyed and understood.

This effects of this process can be improved further by the choice of suitable preparation and follow up. Asking the two people to follow certain guidelines or groundrules can further assist. Its uses can be extended to a variety of situation by varying the nature of the information exchanged. It can be extended further by embedding it in other, more strategic, processes.

These variations and additions are described in the pages that follow. This simple process, however, lies at the heart of all the procedures discussed later. To understand it is to increase your ability to help other people to improve their relationships. You can also use it as a guide to improving your own communication, and your own relationships.

The elements of mediation

This section, and the section which follows, present techniques for mediation. I use this term interchangeably with other terms often used to describe similar approaches; it is often called third party conflict resolution or third party peacemaking.

The whole topic of mediation is surrounded by a considerable mystique. It is usually regarded as a task for an experienced consultant. In my view the time has come to demystify it. The processes described here place it within the control of anyone with a reasonable level of problem solving and communication skills.

In any event, I don't believe that the mystique is warranted. After all, we expect people to resolve conflicts when they are part of the problem. Third party mediation is a lot easier than that.

The overall approach I describe here is highly structured and logical. It therefore does not require a great deal of experience for its successful conduct. Provided you have the reasonable level of face to face communication and problem solving skills already mentioned, all you will need is a willingness to see things through once you start them. These are the main prerequisites for its effective use.

The method was developed in the first instance for use by people with little experience. It is by now a reasonably well-tried method. It also provides some useful techniques that more experienced people may find useful. If you are a novice you will find that with practice you will begin to introduce your own variations to it. You are encouraged to do so.

I describe here little more than the bare bones of the method. With experience you will develop a lot of short cuts. That too is to be encouraged.

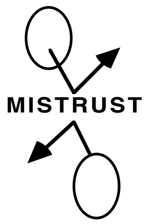
Later sections extend this approach so that it can be used by one of the people involved in a conflict or interpersonal problem—do-it-yourself conflict management, in effect.

Both these approaches are for dealing with conflict which has become serious enough to demand attention. Approaches which help to prevent conflict are mentioned later, on the grounds that prevention is better than cure.

In the course of describing this approach, I also make brief mention of a number of variations which allow it to be used for task oriented team building ("role negotiation") and a few different types of relationship oriented team building.

The conceptual foundations

A mediator typically faces a situation where two people have some need to communicate. But mistrust has arisen as a barrier to their communication.

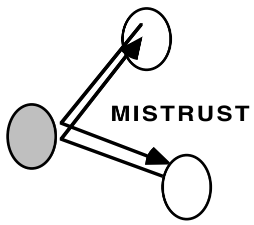


Mistrust prevents communication

The central task of the mediator is therefore to work through four main stages.

1. Develop a high level of trust with each of those in dispute.
2. Channel between them enough information to build some level of trust between them.
3. Achieve an interchange of the information needed to bring about a resolution of the conflict.
4. Oversee the resolutions to ensure that all interests (including the interests of anyone not present) are taken into account.

Provided there is sufficient trust between the mediator and each of the other people, the information to build trust can be channelled via the mediator.



The mediator can channel communication to build trust

The stages described above are expanded below to a description of the features of conflict resolution, and later to one possible sequence of steps.

Features of mediation

There are many approaches to conflict resolution. All tend to share a number of features. Most progress through very much the same stages. Important features that are common to many approaches include the following ...

- The participants are in some way encouraged to give the appropriate information, being as specific and concrete as they can.
- The open and appropriate expression of feelings is encouraged, in such a way that the feelings can be dealt with.
- Active listening (that is, listening to understand what is really being said) is encouraged, and understanding is checked.
- A problem-solving approach is encouraged, with the relevant information first exchanged and understood, and then applied towards the development of a resolution.
- Resolutions satisfactory to all parties are sought.

These are the functions that must somehow be achieved during the conflict resolution session. You will have noticed that some of them are addressed by the process for information exchange described earlier.

These functions can be achieved in an unstructured way by the mediator. Very often, that is what happens. Many descriptions of mediation might consequently be described as impressionistic.

Alternatively, the functions can be achieved by the process itself. If all the necessary functions can be built into the process, an experienced mediator is not needed.

The required process is complex at first glance, and thus difficult to understand. Fortunately it can be broken down into a number of separate components, each quite simple. The complexity lies in their interaction. I will call the components frameworks.

Each of the frameworks can be separately learned and practised. After they have been learned separately they can be combined into an overall mediation process.

I describe below the four frameworks which can guide the novice through the conflict resolution session. Each of the four frameworks will be described separately. The ways in which they can be combined will be addressed later.

Frameworks

I begin with the most fine-grain of the frameworks, which might be called micro-processes. I then proceed to those that operate over longer time spans.

- Statement shaping consists of a set of questions which the mediator uses to guide the participants towards a first person statement.
- Information exchange consists of a process which allows for the interchange of information so that understanding is maximised. It has already been described.
- Information selection consists of a set of criteria which, used in conjunction with the statement shaping questions, help to identify the relevant information.
- Resolution selection consists of a set of criteria for deciding whether to reach resolution through consensus or negotiation.

Two of these frameworks depend on a set of assumptions about the relationship between different types of information, which is treated first. Then each of the frameworks is described in turn in more detail.

Relationships between information types

Imagine that you and I are having some trouble within a relationship. I will often see my reaction as arising from your behaviour, or from the consequences it produces for me. And sometimes this is true.

actions → outcomes → actions

It is not as common as it might at first appear. My reaction, for example, may be an acting out of my emotional response to the behaviour or the consequences. The arrangement is therefore more like this.

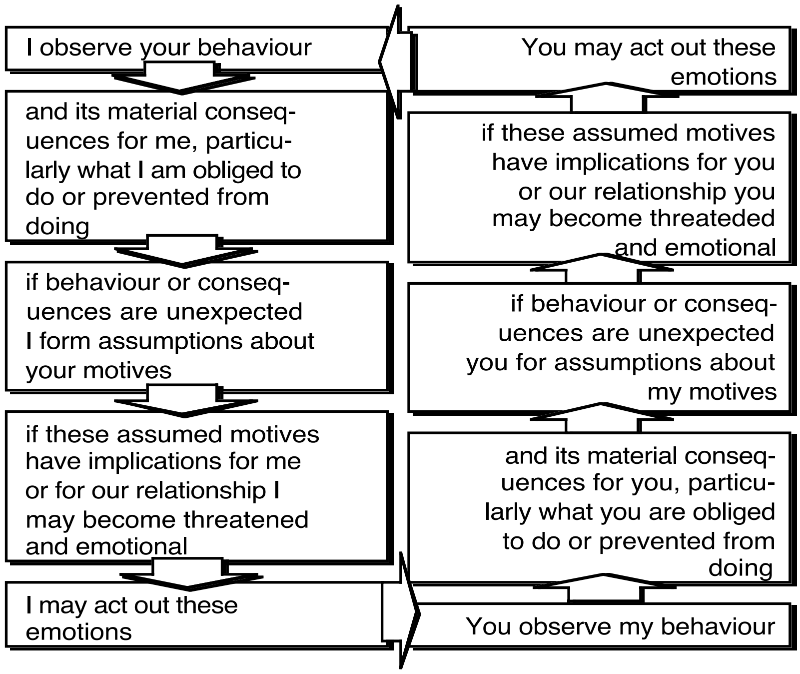
actions → outcomes → feelings → actions

The most common situation is more complicated. My emotional reaction is not directly to your behaviour or its consequences. It is more likely to be to some beliefs I have, or develop, about the situation. I may assume that the behaviour or the consequences imply something about myself, or your attitude toward or relationship with me. In particular, I may develop beliefs about the motives underlying your behaviour, or the consequences it produces. The pattern is then like this:

actions → outcomes → beliefs → feelings → actions

My beliefs and feelings are, of course, invisible to you. All you observe is my behaviour. Lacking a full explanation of it, you may form your own assumptions about my motives. If your reaction is an amplification of the behaviour that fuelled the problem in the first instance, then a mutual self fulfilling prophecy has been created. The complete pattern now resembles that shown in the diagram overleaf.

As the work of Argyris and Schön suggests, self fulfilling prophecies are more common than might be imagined, and are particularly likely to arise from unstated assumptions about the other person.



The information chain

Statement shaping

One of the goals of a mediator in conflict resolution is to enable the two people in dispute to adopt a problem solving attitude towards the conflict. For this to be done, the appropriate part of the information shown in the diagram above must be exchanged and understood.

The information is unlikely to be expressed in this form at the beginning. The mediator, however, can take the information in any form. The following set of questions can then be used to get the person to convert the statement into a more effective form. The questions, related to the type of information, are shown below.

The questions about beliefs and feelings are usually omitted to start with. They can be introduced as necessary.

In the early stages of the conflict resolution session, the person may be asked initially to address her statement to the mediator. It is first shaped into an appropriate first person statement. Then, when it can more easily be understood, it can be directed to the other person. The person on the receiving end will by then have had time to become used to it. She will thus be less likely to react defensively.

The specific behaviour causing the problem	*Exactly what did X do that created the problem for you?*
The material consequences of that behaviour	*How were you affected? What were you obliged to do or prevented from doing?*
The assumptions held about the motives behind the behaviour	*When X does that, what do you assume it is that she is trying to accomplish?*
The emotional reaction to the situation	*When that happens, how do you feel like reacting?*
The specific behaviour in reaction	*What, specifically, do you think you actually do?*

Questions for statement-shaping

Information exchange

The process for information has already been described in an earlier section. You will recall that it was intended to improve the communication between two people. It does this by using a process which substitutes for speaking and listening skills which the two people may not have. Here is the process in summary.

A non-defensively describes one item from her list, while
- **B** first listens, trying to understand what it is like for **A**;
- **B** then may ask questions, for clarification only;
- **B** finally restates **A**'s point of view in her own words;

then ...

B responds non-defensively to **A**, while
A listens, trying to understand what it is like for **B**;
A asks questions, for clarification only;
A restates **B**'s point of view in her own words;

A responds non-defensively to **B**, while
B listens ...

and so on until agreement is reached.

It is important that this is applied to only one small item at a time, with one exception to be covered later.

Information selection

There is often no way of knowing, at the beginning of an item, if information about beliefs and feelings is needed to reach a resolution. Some items can be resolved by information only about behaviour, consequences and reaction. A simple approach is to begin all items in this way. The other information is then added only when it becomes becomes apparent that it is necessary.

This approach offers other benefits as well. Firstly, many people will express such information more willingly than they would if it contained information about beliefs and feelings. Secondly, it can easily be expressed in terms of specific behaviours and objects, and is therefore easy to understand and confirm. Thirdly, the extra information can later be expressed behaviourally, and tied back to these visibles. Understanding, and resolution, are thus more easily achieved. The process is as follows.

1. At first each person gives information about the other person's behaviour, the material consequences for herself, and her behavioural reaction (or intentions). The consequences are often most easily expressed in terms of what she is thereby obliged to do, or hindered from doing.

actions → outcomes → actions
actions ← outcomes ← actions

2. If either A or B becomes upset, the speaker then adds information about her emotional reaction, to the information about behaviours and consequences already available. This can be expressed behaviourally as what she "feels like doing".

actions → outcomes → feelings → actions
actions ← feelings ← outcomes ← actions

3. If it appears that the emotional reaction has a history, information about beliefs is further added to the information exchanged. The beliefs usually consist of assumptions about the other person's motives. They can usually be expressed in terms of what she assumes the other person is trying to accomplish.

actions → outcomes → beliefs → feelings → actions
actions ← feelings ← beliefs ← outcomes ← actions

In this way, specific and visible acts and things are described first. Such information has the advantage that it is more easily understood and verified. Feelings and beliefs are then expressed as felt or assumed behaviours. By being tied back to visible behaviours, they too are more easily verified and understood.

Finally, a way is needed of choosing an approach to resolution. This is described in the next section.

Resolution selection

Some approaches to conflict resolution assume that resolution by consensus is possible. Others use negotiation (bargaining, or horse-trading) from the outset. I assume that consensus is preferably when it works, as it represents an outcome which is very suitable for both. Negotiation will partly resolve some issues on which consensus is not possible. Although it will often give a less satisfactory resolution than consensus, it will also often provide a resolution when one would otherwise not be possible.

One way of allowing for this is to begin by trying for consensus, but then to switch to negotiation if necessary. The overall system then has three stages, treated as priorities.

1. After A and B have exchanged the relevant information, they try to achieve by consensus a mutually satisfactory resolution within a single item. One of your main tasks as mediator is to prevent them agreeing on a resolution unless the information exchanged is specific, and each of them accepts it as true.
2. It may become clear that resolution is impossible because there is no outcome that is better for both A and B. If so, they try instead to use bargaining to achieve an outcome where both are better off. They do this by adding a second (usually related) item so that a mutually-advantageous trade is possible.
3. If even this is not possible, A and B persist until there is clear understanding of each other's position. If this is reached, they are usually able to agree to differ, and will regard this as in some sense a resolution. Information about beliefs and feelings is usually required before this can occur.

Now all that is required is to assemble these four frameworks together into an overall process. Such a process is described, as a set of steps, in the next major section.

The overall process of mediation

The main sequence of steps in this approach to conflict resolution can now be described. Most parts of this process will also apply to the other interventions described later. The sequence is as follows.

1 Initial interviews. The mediator talks privately, confidentially and at length to each of those in dispute. The goals of these interviews are threefold.

- To give the mediator enough data to know: how much common ground there is, whether those in dispute have some superordinate goal, whether or not they realise it, and how motivated they are to do something about the conflict.
- To give those in dispute a chance to get to know the mediator, to develop some trust in her, and to become familiar with her style and approach. The trust is crucial.
- To encourage those in dispute to think about the conflict in constructive ways. This may include helping them to get in touch with some of the specifics of it. It is likely to include beginning to explore what it might look like from the other person's point of view.

2 Conclusion of interviews. Towards the end of the interviews the mediator attempts to get commitment towards the coming sessions, and to inform those in dispute of the way in which the sessions will be conducted.

3 List preparation. Each of those in dispute individually prepares a list, or series of lists, of some of the relevant issues. The nature of the lists can be varied to suit the approach being used. (For example, by varying the lists one can convert this process into a role negotiation session.) Whatever the type of lists used, they tend to include two (and often three) main elements.

- A list of favourable items.
- A list of unfavourable items.
- An "empathy" list, where a person tries to predict what the other person is likely to be saying.

A list based on the role negotiation model of Harrison (1973) can be used in a variety of situations. It is eminently suitable for the present approach to conflict resolution, even though Harrison uses it for role negotiation.

- I would like you to continue to do the same amount of ...
- I would like you to do more of ...

- I would like you to do less of ...
- I think you would like me to ...

Harrison uses the first three of these. I prefer to include the empathy list as a way of getting people to consider that there is another point of view.

The style of the session can be changed enormously merely by changing the nature of this list.

4 Exchange. This information is then exchanged one item at a time, in such a way that each of those in dispute understands the other's point of view. The procedure is that described earlier for the exchange of information.

- A describes an item to B nondefensively while B is given the task of listening for understanding, without debate; B then asks questions for clarification only, again without debating the issue (trying only to understand A's point of view), and finally repeats back what A has just said, to A's satisfaction;
- B responds to A, nondefensively describing what the situation looks like from her perspective, while A first listens for understanding, then asks questions for clarification only, and then repeats back what B has said;
- A responds to B, and so on ...

During this step, the mediator discourages the people in dispute from trying to reach a resolution. Instead, she asks them to postpone resolution until each of them fully understands the other's point of view. Then and only then do they move onto the next step.

5 Resolution by consensus. The procedure of step 4 is followed until all the relevant information has been exchanged and understood. At this point, if the two people do not move naturally into problem solving, the mediator encourages them to do so. This can be done by inviting the person likely to be least advantaged by the resolution to propose a solution. If necessary, the procedure for information exchange can be used again here. The important thing is to ensure that the following conditions are satisfied.

- The proposed resolution and its consequences are specified in detail. The minimum decision is one which agrees on who is to do precisely what, by when, and with what consequences.
- The proposed resolution and its consequences are understood by both.

6 Negotiation. If the item cannot be resolved, B than takes a related item. A and B work again through the steps above, this time with their roles reversed (for example B states the item while A listens for understanding, and then repeats back, ... and so on). A and B then try to find some tradeoff that leaves them both better off. The procedure for information exchange is again used.

7 Agreement to differ. If still no resolution is possible, the mediator persists until each understands the other's point of view. At this point, they will usually decide to agree to differ. If based on real understanding, this is often felt to be an appropriate resolution by both people even if it leaves the mediator feeling unsatisfied.

8 Recording of decision. In any event, whenever a decision is made it is recorded by the mediator.

9 Other items. This procedure is repeated for other items, A and B alternating in introducing the items. For each item, the two people seek resolution on one small item by consensus if possible. Otherwise the use resolution by negotiation between pairs of items.

10 End of session. At the end of the session, the decisions made are examined to ensure that ...

- there is agreement on each of them;
- that they state specifically who is to do what, and by when;
- that the intended (and likely) consequences are specified;
- that none of them appear to affect any person not present.

11 Follow up. Time and place for a later session (to review progress) is agreed. It may be better if this is after some of the decisions will have been acted on, so that the consequences can be checked. It is useful at this point for the mediator to discourage the two people from being too optimistic about their

decisions. Some decisions are likely to require later revision in the light of experience. It avoids some unpleasantness if this is realised now. You can think of it as inoculating the people against failure.

When things go wrong

After the section on conflict management without a mediator, I have included some suggestions for recovering from the problems that sometimes threaten a conflict management session. These are also relevant to mediated conflict resolution.

Do it yourself conflict management

It is harder to work on a problem when you are part of it. This is partly because you probably don't see it that way. More importantly, if your feelings become sufficiently aroused, you will find yourself unable to deal with them and other issues at the same time. Trying to do more than one thing at a time often leads only to failure on all of them.

Apart from these difficulties, do-it-yourself conflict management need not be as difficult a matter as is sometimes thought. You can use the same method as a mediator would. Successful mediation is primarily the art of asking the right questions. You ask both yourself and the other person the questions that a mediator would ask.

In fact the process is reasonably simple provided you are familiar with its components. It is often its execution that is difficult. This is usually because your feelings and beliefs get in the way. Self management therefore precedes conflict management. This will therefore be dealt with briefly later.

There is a further minor difficulty. The other person may see you as applying some procedure to your own advantage. ("Don't you use that psychology non-sense on me!"). Fortunately, this can easily be sidestepped.

- Ensure that both of you are to some extent willing to change in the interests of securing a better arrangement.
- Choose a time when neither of you is particularly upset or rushed.
- Agree on the procedure before you start. Allowing the other person a genuine say in how it is to be done. Be very very careful not to use your expert knowledge to persuade the other person to choose a particular procedure. You can use the conflict resolution procedure to agree on a procedure.
- Make sure that you try to deal with only one small item at a time (except where the use of negotiation requires that two items be considered).
- Take great pains to talk in English.

To disregard even one of these is to risk failure. All of them are important.

The use of good communication skills are also important. If you are unsure of your skill, perhaps you would be better advised to obtain the help of a mutually-trusted third party.

There is no point, by the way, in pretending that you are not upset if you really are. The other person will realise that something is wrong, often without quite knowing why. Issues are much more easily worked on if the message conveyed by your words and by your non-verbals (tone of voice, expression, posture, and so on) are in agreement. Mixed messages are confusing, and often upsetting. You will therefore need some skill at managing your own arousal and anxiety. If it becomes too great for you to continue, say so. Take a walk around the block, stop for a cup of tea, or find some other way to take some time out. Be warned, though, that if you don't tell the other person what is going on she may suspect the worst.

The overall exercise can be dealt with more easily if the three distinct tasks you face are dealt with separately. The appropriate sequence may vary from that given.

- First, convey your own position without blame or demand.
- Second, find out the other person's position. Obtain, understand, and acknowledge, a clear statement of the other person's feelings and beliefs. Find out, and acknowledge, what actions of yours are part of the issue.
- Third, manage the overall process so that it eventually reaches an outcome you both see as an improvement.

These are the same tasks that were discussed earlier. They consist respectively of first-person skills (unthreatening ways of stating your point of view), second-person skills (for understanding the other person), and third-person skills (for managing the overall process).

A summary here, specifically applied to conflict management, may be useful. The aim of *first person skills* is to convey to the other person the relevant information about ...

- the specific behaviour which is a problem for you;
- the material outcomes of their action, expressed in terms of what you are thereby required to do, or hindered from doing;
- if relevant, the emotional consequences for you, preferably expressed in terms of what you feel like doing;
- if relevant, your beliefs about their intentions, again preferably expressed in behavioural terms; and
- the way you think you react to the situation;

and to do all this as far as possible without implying blame on their part, or criticising them, or demanding that they do certain things.

This is not such a limitation as you might imagine. For example, it prevents you from talking directly about what another person believes or feels; but it allows you to describe what you see them do, and what belief you form as a result. So instead of saying

> *"You aren't very loyal!"*

an unprovable assertion, you can more constructively say

> *"When you go back on agreements I think we've made, such as when yesterday you didn't complete the job you said you would, I find it hard not to think that you don't have much concern for the organisation or me, and I get upset."*

Second person skills have as their main purpose the securing and understanding of the complementary information to what you have. This information consists of ...

- the actions of yours which the other person sees as contributing to the problem;
- the material consequences for her;
- if relevant, her emotional responses; and
- if relevant, her assumptions about your intentions.

In practice you can do this by using the LACE (listen, acknowledge, check, enquire) approach described earlier. Avoid enquiry while the other person is upset — acknowledgement is the most constructive way of helping her dispose of here feelings.

When she is no longer upset you can use enquiry to ask those questions which will lead her closer to a clear, specific, non-blaming statement of what the problem looks like from her perspective. It is important that you do all this without debating the issue or trying to justify your own position. It is important that you continue to give more attention to acknowledgment than to enquiry.

In other words, concentrate at any one time either on conveying the information you have, or getting the information the other person has. When you are trying to get the other person's information concentrate on understanding what she is trying to say.

To decide what should be done at any one moment is the role of *third person skills*. There is no one sequence of events which will guide you safely through a conflict resolution session. Each problem has its unique components. Each person and relationship is different. Successful resolution comes from adjusting the process to be moment-by-moment needs of those taking part. This can most easily be done by observing the two sets of priorities listed earlier.

- When you encounter a difficulty which hinders progress, move to a higher priority level of the FIDO priorities.
- Always give higher priority to the other person's concerns than to your own, except where there is some barrier to the exchange of information. Be prepared to shelve your own concerns at any time until you have helped resolve the other person's concerns.

It helps to remember that these are not intended to be stages of the conflict management or communication process. Instead, they are a set of priorities which you can use as a guide to action. The implications are quite simple. To use FIDO ...

- If the desired outcomes are not being produced, re-examine the decisions which were made. Alter them so that the outcomes are more likely to occur. (*"We've tried that, but it isn't working. Let's see if we can work out another arrangement that will work."*)
- If decisions are being debated but not agreed, get some more information. (*"What information would help us to choose between those issues we're debating, or perhaps find a third alternative we'd both be happy with?"*)
- If the information seems to be available, but people are having trouble accepting it or using it, assume that feelings are involved. Try to work

through them first. ("*You don't seem very enthusiastic about that — how would you be affected if we did it that way?*")

- If you or the other person find that the feelings seem irrational or hard to understand, assume that there are some underlying assumptions (perhaps about each other's motives, or about what is "right").

There are some ideas which may help you when you are trying to resolve differences which have a belief component (as they often have in generation-gap relationships, or where people have very different roles). In no particular order, here they are.

- Many grievances arise not out of the apparent issue, but the message that is read into it. If these often mistaken beliefs can be dealt with, the situation will be better understood. Acceptance of the other person's right to her beliefs and feelings then often emerges.
- Many of the issues revolve around the dual issues of rights that and responsibilities. Usually we talk only about our own rights and the other person's responsibilities. A heated debate can be turned into a constructive talk if both people talk about rights and responsibilities as inseparable sides of the same coin. ("I believe I have a right to decide how to do that. What responsibility do you think that entails?" or "Can I expect you to complain to me instead of going over my head, if I guarantee that if I can't decide on an issue I'll take it further?"
- It helps to remember that an angry or withdrawing person is reacting to some threat (real or imagined). If the perceived threat can be removed, so can the anger or withdrawal.
- Both participants in a conflict management session can expect to have some doubts about the changes that might result. These can be more easily handled if both are prepared for decisions to be revised if they turn out to be less than satisfactory in practice. It therefore makes sense to agree to things for a specific (and reasonably short) time, on a trial basis. It is then much less risky for people to make a decision, and much easier for them to bring it up

again if it turns out to be unsuitable. ("How would it be if we tried it for a week, and then had another look at it?")

- Because of the type of issue that often sparks differences of opinion, a debate will all too readily become a power struggle or a vendetta. Power may be defined as the ability to make decisions. But few decisions are so simple that they have to be all-or-none. It may help to remember that many decisions can be shared. Role responsibilities can be worked out between colleagues or peers. Bosses and parents may be able to define certain limits to freedom, but allow freedom to make decisions within these limits.

Cautions and cures

The procedures listed above will work for both mediated and unmediated conflict management provided three conditions are met.

- If there is a mediator she has the trust of both of the people in dispute.
- Both people wish to see the conflict resolved. Both are willing to compromise to some extent to achieve a resolution.
- Only one item at a time is considered (or two, within a negotiation session).

Someone experienced in conflict resolution can take a lot of short cuts. But experience is not needed. If you are inexperienced it will take a little longer.

If all else fails there are two strategies that can be used to keep on track.

- Check to make sure that you are limiting the discussion to only one item at a time. If you are, try to break it up into a number of smaller items. Consider them one at a time.
- If you are still having trouble, slow the process down still more. Persist longer with your statement shaping before allowing face to face interaction. Use an explanation of the process as a way to cool things off. Take time out for a drink or short break. Go for a walk — it is often easier to talk through difficult issues when you are going for a walk together than sitting down face to face.

If you get lost summarise your present understanding of the state of play, and continue from there. If you can't recollect yourself sufficiently for this, ask the other person to summarise her present understanding and continue from there. Ask the other two people, if you are a mediator.

The prevention of conflict

Clearly, the most effective method for conflict management is to prevent it occurring. In this as in other fields, prevention is preferable to cure, and less painful. Two broad approaches are possible.

The first and most obvious is team building. It strengthens and improves relationships so that conflict will less seldom arise. When it does, it can be resolved before it becomes serious.

Unfortunately, the benefits of team building are often short lived. Team building may resolve present conflicts. If interdependencies are strong and there are communication barriers, new conflicts will in time emerge. Too often, teams with heightened morale and new energy and understanding are sent back into social systems which recreate the problems almost as soon as they can be solved.

The second strategy is to structure the wider system so that those people who are interdependent can communicate easily. This is prevention which lasts. If the structure reflects the real interdependencies, team building may not be needed. If it is, it will work more effectively and last longer.

Consequently, structure is dealt with in the next section as a precursor to team building. An approach to team building is then described. It uses role negotiation as the main vehicle for improving relationships.

Before doing this, I say something about the purpose of organisations and social systems and the nature of their structure. It will be found that role negotiation is as much a structural intervention as is a conventional restructuring.

Team building consists of activities which clarify the purposes of a team, enhance its functioning, and improve its relationships. Interdependencies are such an important part of this that role negotiation forms a useful core to a team building activity.

I argued earlier that conflict arose whenever two conditions existed ...

- interdependencies between people;
- barriers which hindered the satisfaction of those interdependencies.

On this basis, one might expect it would be easy to define the most effective structure for an organisation or social system. It would be whatever structure made it easiest to satisfy the interdependencies.

If the desire is to minimise conflict, this is so. But it will be seen that other issues also influence the choice of structure.

Organisations and social systems

Organisations (which I shall assume to include all types of social systems) exist because some tasks are too large or too complex to be done by individuals. Large tasks require many individuals to complete them. But unless the efforts of the individuals are coordinated, the tasks may still not be completed well.

Complex tasks often require more specialised expertise than one person can provide. In other words, organisations allow specialisation. But unless the specialists are coordinated, the task may again not be accomplished.

The central goal of organisation is therefore coordination. To do her job, each person requires information or materials or services from others. As part of her job each person provides information or materials or services to others. This traffic flow of information and materials and services, this pattern of interdependencies between people, is literally the life blood of the organisation.

There are two implications which follow from this. Firstly, if you wish to understand the functioning of a social system, look to its traffic flow. Secondly, if you wish to enhance its functioning, improve its traffic flow.

It is important here to distinguish between the official traffic flow (that is, what happens in theory) and the real traffic flow (which consists of the traffic which actually moves from person to person). In what follows the focus will be almost exclusively on the real traffic.

The strategies offered here will be seen to differ somewhat from the more usual practices in organisations. It will therefore help if I say a little about the reason for the two quite different strategies. The approach I describe is to be found in some organisations, though not as commonly as the more traditional approach.

We can proceed by way of a comparison of the two strategies identified by Stafford Beer [4] for structuring our social systems and organisations.

- Control of behaviour. This is the common strategy. It seeks to maximise the control that those in command have over the behaviour of others in the system.
- Control of outcomes. This is a less common strategy, though it is becoming more usual. It seeks to control the use of resources from elsewhere in the system, and the outcomes which affect other parts of the system.

For reasons that Stafford Beer has pointed out, control of behaviour implies control by regimentation. (Beer's word is redundancy, by which he means, roughly,

4. Beer, S. *Platform for change*, Wiley, 1975.

similarity). If everyone is in step, it is easier to recognise and control someone who gets out of step.

This approach is usually found together with a number of other structural features. Some of the important ones are as follows.

- Functional specialisation. Activities are subdivided into small, simple parcels. Thus breadwinning and housekeeping are regarded as separate specialities within the social system that is a family. So are production and marketing, or manufacture and quality control, in an industrial organisation.
- Individual task allocation. The individual is the unit of task allocation. One person washes the dishes, or does the books, or fixes the front wheel to the chassis.
- Grouping by similarity of function. People doing similar tasks are grouped together. Children keep company with other children. At parties, women talk to women and men to men. In organisations, engineers talk mainly to other engineers, and accountants to other accountants.
- Hierarchical specialisation. Activities are grouped hierarchically depending on the "control" or management content they have. In a traditional family, adults make all the decisions. In industry, the first line supervisor may do all the planning, work allocation and checking. The operatives do all the manual labour.
- Coordination from above. The responsibility for coordinating the activities at any one level are located at least one level above. Parents are expected to take responsibility for the behaviour of their children. Colleagues are often required to communicate to each other through their mutual superior.

Whatever the system, this is quite a good strategy for maintaining control if stability can also be maintained. It tends to produce centralised decision making, and reliance on rules and precedents. If today's problems are not much different from those of last year, or last decade, all is well.

The members of the system may be unfulfilled or dissatisfied. The system itself functions well enough, however. It consequently survives. It is no accident that the nation states that survived into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were for the most part large and technically complex. And they were structured along these lines.

Such an approach to structure almost guarantees interpersonal conflict. It places specialists together, instead of with the people they have most need to communicate with. It gives to superiors the task of accomplishing the necessary coordination. Major interdependencies exist between individuals and groups who often see little of each other, have little liking for each other, and see their goals as different.

The alternative structural strategy is to create self-contained sub-units. How these units behave is ignored, provided they achieve the necessary outcomes within the available resources. That the sub-units are self-contained implies that most of the interdependencies are within units rather than between them. Examples are project teams, cost centres, self-managed groups, or (to some extent) rural families.

Compare the requirements of this sort of structure with the requirements for effective team building.

Team building will be needed least often, work most effectively, and be most persistent in its effects, when the following conditions are met:

- Most of the interdependencies are located within a small group of people who interact regularly, face to face.
- These people have agreed overall goals, to which they are committed, and for which the group as a whole is responsible.
- There is approximate equality of power and interdependencies within the group.

- The group has the freedom to change its way of operating provided its use of resources and its outputs are not adversely affected.

You will notice that these conditions imply a strategy of control of outcomes rather than behaviour. Grouping is likely to be by project rather than by specialisation. The result is a structure which is sometimes called *matrix organisation*.

The sections which follow describe ways of improving the structure of a social system. Restructuring defines the overall interdependencies of the system, and alters the structure to reflect the real needs. Role negotiation renegotiates the interdependencies between two people. Team building (at least in the form described here) combines the outcomes of many role negotiations to improve the functioning of a whole team.

Structure

As already noted, the purpose of organisations and most social systems is to provide coordination. We persist with our large systems because of the advantages they offer. They allow us to undertake tasks larger than one person can cope with. They enable us to deal with tasks that are too complex for any one person to have the necessary specialised skills. Coordination is the major purpose of organisations. Structure is the means by which the coordination is achieved.

It will probably be obvious from the previous section that relationships within a system are likely to be more easily maintained under one structure than under the other.

Traditional structures use control by regimentation. This create conditions under which important interdependencies are often between people with different specialisations and different goals. They are also separated structurally. This results in important barriers to communication between people who really depend upon one another for their work effectiveness. Conflict between people is almost endemic to such a system.

Matrix structures, on the other hand, often group together those people who are most interdependent. Under these conditions, friction can be dealt with at its source, within a team where people interact regularly face to face. Conflict is less likely to arise, and more likely to be remedied easily.

Please understand what I am recommending. I am not saying "Adopt a project team or matrix organisation". This may only be feasible when you are not competing with other systems on cost efficiency, or where you face an unstable situation.

Traditional structures are most common where the task seldom changes, for instance when long production runs provide a form of stability. This is because under such conditions they are most efficient. Matrix types of structure are most common where each job is different and conditions change rapidly, for example in such fields as design or construction.

What I am saying is this. Adopt, by all means, the most effective structure for system survival. If this is a traditional type of structure, expect conflict. Expect superiors and subordinates to be suspicious of each other, and colleagues to be competitive. Expect production and marketing, or parents and teenagers, or line and staff, to have trouble communicating and cooperating.

In such a system, don't blame the people concerned when conflict emerges. Be prepared to remedy it from time to time. Too often, we find some way of blaming the victims. In my experience, most "personality conflicts" on examination turn out to be partly structural.

On the other hand, the rate of change in many systems is increasing. The structures that used to work are beginning to break down from time to time. When solutions don't work as well as they used to, perhaps it's time to examine the structure. Structure is, after all, a solution to problems of coordination. If the nature of the problem changes more rapidly than it used to, then a different approach to structure may be warranted.

If so, your starting point is to define the real interdependencies that exist. As already stated, interdependencies consist of the traffic flow which organisations serve to manage — traffic in material, information and services.

If control and coordination in your social group or organisation are achieved by controlling behaviour, you will be accustomed to looking at the activities of individuals. To look at interdependencies, examine what happens between individuals. Look not at the individuals, but at the "traffic flow" between them.

If the essential traffic flow is heavier between groups than it is within groups, and if this causes serious problems, restructuring may be warranted.

Developing rational structures

In essence the procedure for restructuring a social system is not particularly complex. Here are the main steps. [5]

1. Identify the interdependencies, real and imagined. Define the information, materials and services that people actually interchange, and those needed if they are to be productive and satisfied.

   In defining interdependencies it is worth remembering that there are more interdependencies than are at first apparent. Three distinct levels of interdependency may be identified.

   - Primary interdependencies are consist of the material, information and services needed directly by a person to perform a task or activity.

5. These ideas are developed in a slightly different way in D. Dunphy in collaboration with R. Dick, *Organisational change by choice*, McGraw-Hill Australia, Sydney, 1981.

- Secondary interdependencies consist of the information needed to manage the primary interdependencies. If the family member who works for money is to provide enough money to the person who manages the household, she must be notified what money is needed. To know whether existing services are adequate, a maintenance worker needs information in the form of feedback from a machine operator.
- Tertiary interdependencies consist of the psychological effects of the primary and secondary traffic flow. If the breadwinner provides money in a way that implies reservation, the housekeeper may feel devalued. If maintenance is not provided when needed, the operator may be led to believe that no one cares about the job she is doing.

2. Reduce unnecessary interdependencies. These may be caused by unnecessary rules, double handling, or unnecessary supervision. They may arise from decisions made at higher levels than needed. They frequently result from demands for information on the basis of precedent rather than need.

   It is not unusual, for example, for a supervisor to alter any correspondence written by a subordinate. If each level of the organisation alters the correspondence which arises at the work face, those who first draft the correspondence are likely to become demoralised. There attitude is likely to be "If the letter is going to be altered anyway, there is little point in trying to get it right". The result is likely to be a lot of wasted effort, and a lot of dissatisfaction. Multiple but unnecessary handling of materials or information is common in many social systems.

3. Identify which of the real interdependencies are short term, and which long term. At steps 4 to 6 below, use short term mechanisms like project teams, seminars, and the like for short term interdependencies. Use long term mechanisms like more permanent structures for long term interdependencies.

4. Locate as many of the necessary interdependencies within an intact group of people who interact regularly, face to face. If the group cannot function well together at the start, provide team building to improve group cohesion and morale.

5. Of the interdependencies still remaining, locate as many as possible between groups with similar levels of stability and power, similar management styles, and approximate equality of interdependencies. If the groups can then be located in physical proximity, some informal linking function will probably be able to manage the interdependencies quite well. If the people concerned have trouble at first in managing their interdependencies, provide intergroup team building to improve the necessary relationships.
6. If the conditions of step 5 are not met, create a formal mechanism for handling the interdependencies. Use regular reports, regular meetings with formal agenda, a separate person or groups (peer or superior) with responsibility for coordination, and so on.
7. Expect a little trouble from time to time within a group, a fair amount between groups, and a lot where formal mechanisms are needed.

If the present rate of change continues to increase, structural change can be expected to become much more common. As this is a recently developed field of theory (there was some excellent early work, but not greatly built on), and a largely undeveloped field of practice, you can also expect further developments.

Role negotiation

A procedure for conflict resolution has already been described in some detail. This same procedure can be used to prevent conflict. Instead of waiting for the conflict to arise, the people concerned may decide to revise their working relationship. The main difference from the previously described procedure is that information about beliefs and feelings is less likely to be needed.

Because a conflict resolution procedure is used, the role negotiation may move easily into conflict resolution if that becomes necessary. Because the procedure is robust, it will often be possible for role negotiation to proceed without a third party being needed.

In addition, the procedure described below lends itself to being embedded into a team building exercise.

In what follow, I first assume that a third party will be used. Some guidelines for third parties are therefore included. A detailed description of the procedure for role negotiation then follows. Some minor variations are then described.

Later sections describe the use of the same procedure as part of a team building activity.

The third party

In role negotiation, two people renegotiate their working relationship so that both of them are better off after the negotiation. If there is a third party, her task is then to help the two of them to manage the process and to achieve this.

The third party may be a consultant from outside the organisation or system, or someone from within the system in the personnel or training or human resources position. Alternatively she may be a colleague who is mutually acceptable to the two people renegotiating their relationship.

The role of the third party in the sessions for two includes the following.

1. Help the two people to observe the requirements of effective communication.
2. Help them to observe the following three groundrules for negotiation.
    a. Anyone affected by a problem or its likely solutions takes part in the decision making.
    b. Trying for a resolution is postponed until all the relevant information has been exchanged and understood.
    c. Problems are stated as common (or at least compatible) goals, without implying blame or making demands.
3. Keep a record of all decisions made. If the role negotiation is part of a team building exercise, these decisions are also reported back to the whole team

for ratification. In other circumstances, it may be useful to circulate the decisions to colleagues, to check that there are no unintended consequences for others.

4. Keep an agenda list of issues affecting other people. In a team building exercise, this too is later reported back to the whole team. In other settings it is used as a reminder that other people will have to be contacted if the issues are to be resolved.

Meetings for two

Meetings for two (or three) form the main part of the role negotiation procedure. In addition they an important component of the team building approach described later.

Preparation

Some preliminaries can usefully be addressed before the actual role negotiation takes place. If part of team building, this preparatory work is likely to be done as part of that. If a separate exercise, useful preparatory activities include the following.

- Clarify the overall goal of the negotiation. For example, is it to address some particular part of the working relationship between the two people? Or is it to be more open ended? Is it to focus primarily on the tasks the two people are responsible for, or is it intended to improve their relationship generally?
- If necessary, secure the support of the two people's immediate superior. A rough rule of thumb is this. If decisions made by the two people are unlikely to affect anyone else, sanction is probably not needed. Otherwise it is. Notifying the superior is often a useful courtesy even when it is not strictly necessary.
- If necessary, check that the goals being pursued are compatible with the goals of the work team or group of which the two people are part. Specify what other constraints have to be taken into account in the decisions.

If a third party is not to be used, you will also find it helpful to review the groundrules and the procedure before starting.

Lists

As with the conflict resolution procedure already described, the main part of the exercise begins with the preparation of lists.

While the third party (if there is one) studies her role, each of the two team members prepares for the coming session by compiling lists of items for discussion. The nature of these lists has a profound influence on the character of the session. Merely by varying the contents of the list, different styles of team building can be approximated.

The list given below is the one I most often use. Sometimes you may find it useful to do other preparatory analysis first; I return to describe the preparatory work shortly. The list is suitable for both new and existing teams, and for organisational and other settings.

"The information, materials and services ...

1 I get from you, and need
2 I get from you, and could do without
3 I don't get from you, but need
4 I give to you, and think you need
5 I give to you, and think you could do without
6 I don't give to you, but think you would find useful"

This list has three important characteristics which are worth including when other types of list are substituted.

- It starts with easy items. The more difficult items are left until later. This enables the two team members (and the third party) to get used to the process and each other before tackling heavy material.

- It includes both positive and negative items. This prevents both people losing sight of the positive aspects of their relationship. It also reminds them of the strengths that they can usefully try to maintain when they introduce any changes. At the same time it discourages people from seeking last minute refuge in an unduly rose-coloured view of their relationship.
- It contains what are sometimes called empathy lists. Each person includes her guess as to what is in the other person's lists. Thus items 4 to 6 are a type of mirror to items 1 to 3 respectively. In this way, team members begin to think of the other person's point of view even before they begin the session proper. This also helps them to identify those issues where their perceptions are different. More attention can then be given to a detailed exchange of information about these items.

If these lists are difficult to prepare, this is most likely to indicate one or another of two conditions. Perhaps the two people lack the information to know their interdependencies. In this case some whole-team role analysis [6] is indicated.

1. Each person in turn describes her job responsibilities, summarising the results on newsprint.
2. Her colleagues then ask questions until they are sure they understand her job, and her interdependencies with them.

More probably, the two people may be unused to thinking of their responsibilities in terms of interdependencies. If so, the following preparatory work, done separately by each person, can precede the list-making.

1. List out the responsibilities.
2. Convert the statements of responsibilities into statements of inputs or constraints, and outputs or objectives.
3. Identify the items where the other person is the source of the inputs or constraints, or the target of the outputs or goals.

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6. Rubin. M.. Plovnik. M.S. and Fry. R.E. *Task-oriented team development*. Sloan School of Management. M.I.T., Boston, Mass., 1975.

(A more detailed version of this is given in the next section as part of team building activities.)

Following this preparation, the six lists (described previously) will be found easier to complete.

The two team members (and their chosen third party, if they are using one) now meet together face to face. They work through the items in their lists one item at a time. The procedure they use, with their third party's help, is that described earlier for information exchange. In doing so they pay particular attention to these aspects.

- They take it in turns to present items.
- As in conflict resolution they limit themselves to one small item at a time.
- They adhere closely to the procedure for information exchange, making sure they include a restatement in their own words of everything the other person says.

For the most part, information on feelings and beliefs will not be needed. It can be added when necessary, however. The same process as for mediation can continue to be used.

To achieve resolution, they can also use the previously described approach to choose a method. Resolution by consensus within a single item will often be possible. If so, it is preferable. When it is not suitable, they can switch to negotiation. When negotiation is used, an extra item must be added. In any event, they pursue an item until each of them understands the other's point of view. If necessary they will then be able to agree to differ.

At the completion of the meeting they check that their decisions are specific and have no unexpected side effects. They also agree on a time for their next follow up.

If this is part of a larger team building exercise, any decisions are reported back to the whole team for ratification. This also checks that no one else is adversely affected. Any items which affect people in addition to themselves become part of the whole team agenda.

Even where the role negotiation is self-contained, notifying other team members of their decisions is often a useful thing to do.

Other approaches to role negotiation

In industrial and commercial settings, role negotiation focusses directly on interdependencies arising out of work requirements. In other settings its focus is still on interdependencies, this time those needed for people to achieve enjoyment, and effectiveness in activities.

There are a number of other role-based methods available. Some of them are also robust enough for use without a consultant. One of the best examples is Rubin, Plovnik and Fry's Task oriented team development. [7] It is a complete and well documented package handled locally by the Australian Institute of Management.

Other ways of varying the approach substitute different lists. The lists already described are sometimes unsuitable in community and family settings. An alternative is that used by Roger Harrison, [8] which I have found to work well in any setting I have used it. It can also be useful when time is too short to allow a more detailed approach.

As mentioned earlier, he uses three lists: "I want you to do more of ...; I want you to do less of ...; I want you to do the same amount of ... ." As he describes it, participants use only negotiation to resolve issues.

7. Dayal, I. and Thomas, J. Operation KPE: developing a new organisation. *Journal of Applied Behavioural Science*, 1968, 4, 473-506.
8. Harrison, R. Role negotiation: A tough minded approach to team development. In W. Bennis, D.E. Berlew, E.H. Schein and F.I. Steele (eds.), *Interpersonal dynamics*, 3rd edition, Dorsey Press, 1973.

This can easily be modified to fit the pattern I described earlier. Decision making by consensus can be tried first, and negotiation used only when that does not work. The easiest list (the one requiring few or no changes) can be put first. The empathy equivalents of the first three list can be added. The lists then become those used in the earlier description of mediation. For convenience, here they are again, with slightly different wording.

- Things I would like you to continue doing as you are now.
- Things I would like you to do more of.
- Things I would like you to do less of.
- Things I expect you to want me to continue.
- Things I expect you to want more of.
- Things I expect you to want less of.

These lists can easily be used in most settings. I have found them effective for parent-child role negotiation or conflict management, where many other approaches work only with difficulty. They are also effective in intergroup work.

Relationship oriented variations

Here, the exchange of information moves very rapidly into the exchange of information about feelings. The underlying assumption is that we often don't see each other as people, but as roles. Only through the expression of feelings do we reveal our humanity. We have the capacity to identify with, and care about, people we do see as people.

The lists therefore are intended to produce information about feelings. They can either be directly about the other person, or about one's relationship with that person. An example of each will be given.

One of the well known consultants in the field is Sheldon Davis. He asks each of the two people to compile a list of appreciations of the other, and a list of resentments. He then concentrates, in a quite unstructured way, on getting an exchange of honest information between people. [9]

The same information can of course be exchanged in a more structured way. I have a suspicion that this helps if working with Australians, for it seems to me that we are less likely to be open about our feelings than North Americans. Empathy lists can again be added. The resulting variation on Davis's lists is as follows.

- Things I appreciate about you.
- Resentments I have of you.
- Appreciations I expect you to report of me.
- Resentments I expect you to report of me.

The same reasoning can be applied to information about relationships.

- The strengths of our relationship.
- The weaknesses of our relationship.
- What I expect you to report as the strengths of our relationship.
- What I expect you to report as the weaknesses of our relationship.

After extended role negotiation, a session to focus on relationships may provide some welcome variety. In general, however, my own preference is to use role-based approaches as a starting point. The techniques for mediation described earlier are quite capable of being extended into other areas as necessary.

Hidden agendas

There is in most approaches to team building and conflict management a curious neglect of information about beliefs. In contrast, Argyris and Schön focus

9. There are two fine films in the Saul Gellerman Motivations series that feature Sheldon Davis, the second of which shows an acted conflict resolution session. See also Davis's final chapter in Saul Gellerman's *Behavioural science in management*, Penguin, 1974.

directly on them, particularly on beliefs about the other person's motives. [10] The approach for mediation (described earlier) eventually deals if necessary with information about behaviours, material consequences, feelings and beliefs. The later stages of this were a development of the Argyris and Schön approach.

When Trish Vilkinas and I first began to use this approach, we took the uncovering of assumptions as the starting point. I now prefer in most instances to work through to this material after information about behaviour and material consequences has already been exchanged and understood.

On occasion, however, I use the direct approach — particularly when there is evidence that people have hidden agendas that are interfering with their relationship. This seems most useful when there is already a good relationship existing between the two people.

It can also be a valuable alternative when working with such people as trainers and consultants. In general, they are quite skilled at avoiding issues; the more direct approach of beginning with assumptions may therefore have an impact which other approaches sometimes lack with such sophisticated users.

As usual, the interchange can be preceded by the preparation of lists.

- The assumptions I make about your motives and intentions towards me.
- The specific things I do and say, or feel like doing and saying, when you do things that lead me to make these assumptions.
- The specific evidence on which these assumptions are based.

In use, the most important assumption is then chosen. It is then combined with evidence and responses into a statement such as the following.

10. Argyris, C. and Schön, D.A., *Theory in practice*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1974. A later book by the same authors, *Organisational learning*, McGraw-Hill, 1978, extends the ideas to examine the organisational structures that produce belief based conflicts.

> *"When you do such things as ..., I assume you are trying to ..., and I respond by ... Other evidence on which my assumption is based is ...".*

There is available a draft of a detailed workbook based on this approach. [11]

Team building

The approach to team building that I describe below includes within it the role negotiation procedure described previously. By doing most of the work between pairs of people it reduces dependence on a consultant. When a consultant is used, much of the work can be done as homework without the consultant having to be present.

Whole-group meetings are used to set overall goals, to define the between-person issues, and to coordinate the overall exercise. Most of the actual change in roles and relationships happens in the meetings for two. The process alternates between whole-team meetings, and meetings for two or three.

As it differs from most approaches to team building, perhaps I should mention some of the reasons for my choice. It is robust and easy to understand. It is the approach I am most familiar with. Because it uses the same process as role negotiation and mediation it can be combined with them. It can be adapted with minor changes to a wide range of situations. I have also found it easy to understand, and to teach.

Before using it, a consultant has some role clarification to do with the client group. Then follow a series of other steps.

- Defining the team.
- Setting goals.
- Skills training.

11. *Hidden agendas* (roneod paper, University of Queensland, Department of Psychology, 1982)

- Defining interdependencies.
- Meetings for two or three.
- Whole team meeting.

The process then alternates between the final two steps. Some variations on this sequence are possible, and experienced consultants may wish to experiment.

Initial contact

Although the initial contact between client and consultant sets the tone of most of the rest of the intervention, I don't intend to deal with it in great depth here. There are some important issues to be considered, however, the following included.

- How much commitment does senior management have to the exercise? Will sufficient time be available during working hours for the whole team meetings? At the start you can assume that at least half a day every few weeks is desirable. After a few months, this can be reduced to half a day a month. After six months it may be reduced further.
- Will the contact between consultant and any person or persons be confidential, unless specifically agreed otherwise? Without confidentiality, a lot of important information is likely to be concealed.
- What accessibility will individuals or pairs of team members have to the consultant or to other expertise? Little access is needed, but people will feel more confident in the meetings for two if they know someone is available if necessary.
- What commitment is there towards proceeding with the activity once it has begun? Without strong commitment, you may wish to reconsider whether or not you will start. It is better not to raise expectations in the first place if those expectations are not going to be met.

Defining the team

Team building is often used with a group of people because they are identified by name or uniform or organisation chart or custom as a team. They may or may not be highly interdependent.

It is better to take nothing for granted. Instead, begin by finding out who depends most on whom. It may be that some people in the team have few interdependencies with others in it. Others outside the team may be highly interdependent with some team members. Team building is more easily applied to a real team than to some fiction of historical convention or the organisation chart.

A couple of questions that I have found useful in identifying interdependencies are as follows. [12]

> *"If you were to be replaced by someone who could not yet carry out your activities properly, who in the entire organisation or system would be most affected ...*
>
> *... in the short term and ...*
>
> *... in the long term?"*
>
> *"If someone else in the organisation or system were similarly replaced by someone who could not yet carry out their activities properly, in whose case would you be most affected ...*
>
> *... in the short term and ...*
>
> *... in the long term?"*

The information gained from this exercise can be used later to identify the people who will be first to work in pairs.

After defining the team, the next task is to define those issues that the team can work on. This is done by focussing on the outcomes or goals that the team is to produce. At this stage it is also important to define the constraints which may

12. I owe these questions to my colleague John Damm, who uses them in some of his own work.

influence how those outcomes are to be produced. A simple goal setting exercise will usually suffice to do this.

Goal setting

The only issues than can be effectively worked on within a team are those that affect only the team. If other people are also affected, then their involvement is appropriate. In such instances, it is often better to deal with team issues first, and the wider issues later.

A simple procedure for goal setting is as follows.

1. Team members individually define what they see as team goals. This material is then collated.
2. Team members individually define the stakeholders, the people who depend in any way on what the team does, or how it does it. This material is then collected into a list which is kept on display during the rest of the goal setting exercise.
3. The goals are examined, to see if there are any which need to be modified to take account of the legitimate needs of the stakeholders.
4. The goals are placed in priority order by voting or discussion. Voting is safer. The following procedure can be used. It will give a good spread of priorities.
    - Count the items on the list (better still, number them as you write them up). Double that number. Divide it by the number of people present. For instance, with 19 items and 5 people the arithmetic goes like this: twice 19 is 38, divided by 5 is 7 and a bit, round to 8.
    - Call the result x. Ask each person to choose the x most important goals (excluding their own suggestions) and the x next most important goals (which may include their own suggestions).
    - Ask people to place 2 check marks against each of their most important items, and one check mark against each of their next most important items. If the people differ in status or rank, ask those higher in the peck-

ing order to wait until last. Count up the check marks. The number of check marks indicates the priority.

5. As many of the goals as possible, and including all the high priority goals, are then combined into a statement of the form ...

   "The team goal is to ... in such a way that ..."

6. Team members individually define the constraints which have to be met in resource use, outcomes, or methods used to produce outcomes.
7. The constraints are placed in priority order by discussion or voting.
8. The second part of the goal statement is altered to take account of as many of the constraints as possible, and particularly the high priority constraints.

There are many ways in which a team can work from goals towards a series of improvement exercises. One is to use a problem analysis technique to identify any barriers to more effective goal attainment. Another is to compile a list of problems, and work through them in order of priority. I have described some of these possibilities in another document. [13]

The approach to be described here is to define interdependencies more precisely than before, and then use the resulting interdependencies as the basis for forming pairs for role negotiation.

Skills training

It helps the later robustness of the exercise if team members have reasonable communication skills. This is an appropriate point for the provision of some communication skills training, if necessary. There are numerous activities reported in a variety of books for this purpose. Or practice exercises for the approach described earlier are available. [14]

13. *Helping groups to be effective*. Interchange, Chapel Hill, 1991.
14. *Learning to communicate* (see note 3).

This can usefully be combined with an exercise which helps to set a climate within which better communication is possible. One brief but effective climate setting exercise [15] has the following steps.

1. Team members begin by working individually and without discussion. They recall recent occasions when they participated in or observed ineffective discussion groups. As they do this, they try to imagine the situation as vividly as possible: where and when the group met; who was there; what the purpose was; how it began. They try to identify the actual behaviours (what people said or did) that interfered with the effectiveness of the group. As each member thinks of some ineffective behaviour, she lists it down on a private list.
2. Working in groups of only two or three (three works slightly better than two), team members develop a combined list. They do this by writing down on butcher paper those behaviours which appear on more than one of their lists.
3. Each small group places its list of behaviours in order of priority, by discussion or voting. The highest priority items are those that do most to interfere with group effectiveness.
4. Optionally, the small groups can compare notes at this point. This can be done by posting the lists on the wall, and each group talking very briefly to them. If this is done, groups may if they wish add items from other lists to their own lists.
5. Beginning with the highest priority item, and working through the first five to seven items, the small groups develop groundrules.
    - Take the (next) highest priority item which is not already covered by a groundrule (sometimes the early groundrules also address items appearing later on the list).

15. This technique for climate setting is developed from one that Hollis Peter and I used during a job redesign workshop at the Roma Street Mail Exchange in 1975. It is described in greater detail in *Learning to communicate* (note 3) and elsewhere.

- Devise a groundrule which would eliminate the behaviour, for example by devising a mirror image of the problem behaviour (if this seems unclear, it will become clearer shortly).
- Record the groundrules, as devised, on a separate sheet of butcher paper.
- On completion of five to seven groundrules, refine each so that it is specific enough to be able to be followed, and so that it is expressed in such a way that its observance or otherwise is easily monitored and policed.

6. Post the lists on a wall. Each group then talks briefly about its list, and answers any questions about the meaning of any of the rules. At the same time the following list of sample behaviours and groundrules is also displayed.

Unconstructive behaviours	**Constructive behaviours**
Pursue private goals	Agree on and pursue common goals
Monopolise and dominate, or withdraw	Share time and decisions
Ignore others, or listen passively	Attend to others, listen for understanding
Criticise ideas	Build on ideas
Act on hidden motives and assumptions	Reveal assumptions and motives before acting on them
Fight for leadership, or leave responsibility to others	All take responsibility for the group's effectiveness

Any group may, if it wishes, add to its own list any groundrule from this sample list or from other groups.

7. Optionally, the various lists are at this point combined into a set of groundrules for the whole team. This can be done by starting with those items that appear on more than one list. If compiled by voting, it is necessary to forbid members of a small group to vote for items from their own group list.
8. If each of the groundrules is now expressed as a rating scale, for example

"pursue private goals 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 pursue common goals" it can be used to monitor group climate, and helps to reinforce good communication habits.

You may also wish to use some outside expertise to arrange some more specific skills training and practice.

To this can usefully be added some special training for third parties or mediators. In the later sessions for two, the group members can use one of their colleagues to in the role of mediator. This both provides good experience for all concerned, and reduces the dependence of the team on an outside consultant.

The main responsibilities for the third party have already been described in the section on role negotiation.

Defining interdependencies

For a role based exercise, the appropriate information to be used consists of information about the interdependencies between people. However, because people are often not used to thinking in terms of interdependencies, some preliminary steps are often useful. One approach follows. For this preparation, each member of the group works individually through steps which were described as useful preparation for role negotiation. Here are the steps again, in a little more detail.

1 Each person lists out her responsibilities as a set of activities. She generates as long a list of activities as she can. Towards the end of this step, people work in pairs to help identify any missing items. If each item is written on a small system card, the next step is easier.

2 Working individually, each person places the items in order of importance. It items are on cards, the cards can be arranged in order of priority.

3 Taking each item in turn, each person identifies the inputs (materials or information or services) needed for it. A separate list is made of these inputs. Leave space at the right of the list for the next step, or again use small cards.

4 Take each input in turn. Identify the people who provide the inputs. If cards are used, this can be done by sorting the cards into separate piles. (You may need to include multiple cards for those inputs that are drawn from several people.)

5 As for the inputs, identify the outputs produced as part of each activity. Again leave a space or work on cards.

6 Identify the people who receive each output. Write the person's name in the space left previously, or sort the cards into separate piles.

It is sometimes useful to type up and duplicate this material so that it can be circulated to all team members. This gives them a chance to peruse it before subsequent meetings.

With this preparation, group members are now ready to identify more closely the people on whom they most depend. This can be done, for example, by reviewing the answers to the questions listed earlier in the section on defining the team.

As each interdependency is identified, the two people concerned can meet to agree on one of their colleagues to act the role of mediator. They are then ready to move on to the heart of the exercise, a role negotiation session between pairs.

The whole team may decide who should meet first with whom. The other details are left to the people concerned. It is usually enough for the date of the next whole team meeting to be decided. Those who meet for role negotiation then know that they have until that time to schedule their meetings with others.

Meetings for two

The two people concerned choose a third party who is mutually trusted. The third party is most conveniently chosen from within the team. If the people prefer, however, they may also choose someone from outside the team. It then becomes their responsibility to ensure that the person is briefed in detail on her role.

A time is arranged for the first meeting. The procedure for role negotiation (described in the previous section) is used.

Lists of decisions are kept for ratification at the next whole team meeting. Agenda items which affect other team members are also listed. These form part of the agenda for the next whole team meeting.

Whole team meetings

After the early whole team meetings, meeting agendas are compiled out of the items arising from the sessions for two. Similarly, if an item affecting only two or three people arises at a whole team meeting, it is placed on an agenda list for those people. In this way, meetings for two arise out of the whole team meeting, while the whole team agenda arises out of the sessions for two.

In this way, the team alternates between whole team meetings, and a series of meetings for two. As agenda items become fewer, the meetings gradually decline in frequency. Eventually, they settle down to whatever is an appropriate frequency for regular meetings.

That concludes the description of this approach to team building. Different processes can be used, if desired, for the meetings for two, although those already described are suitable.

Intergroup team building

During team building, it is not uncommon for team members to identify issues affecting people outside the team. In such instances it is useful to have a procedure which can be used for the between team meetings. This section describes such a procedure.

The need for such an approach might also arise out of a consideration of overall system structure. Where there are between team dependencies, one way of dealing with them might be a regular (for example six-monthly) meeting between the two teams.

The procedure probably requires a mediator. This may consist of someone within the organisation or system who has reasonable communication skills, reasonable credibility, and no axe to grind.

The procedure

The procedure is a variation on that already used for information exchange in the meetings for two. The virtue of this is that people can use a procedure with which they are already familiar. Additional steps are added to allow for the involvement of groups rather than individuals.

1. The mediator gives an overview of the process. She also displays the three groundrules, and asks if all those present agree to abide by them.

   For convenience, here are the groundrules again.

   a. Anyone affected by a problem or its likely solutions takes part in the decision making.

   b. Trying for a resolution is postponed until all the relevant information has been exchanged and understood.

   c. Problems are stated as common (or at least compatible) goals, without implying blame or making demands.

2. Both groups together, acting as a single unit, go through a joint goal and constraint setting exercise. This may be for their organisation as a whole, or for their joint teams. The procedure for goal setting described in the previous section may be used. If there is adequate time, the following procedure will be more likely to give agreement. Whichever procedure is used, the members of the two teams are asked to mix themselves up rather than sit with members of their own team.

2.1 Participants define what they see as collective goals. This is done as follows. The following situation is read out to members.

"Imagine it is now not 1985, but 1995. [Adjust the dates appropriately]. During the last decade, each of your teams have been exceptionally effective in what you do — you have far surpassed any expectations you might have had. Further, there has been exceptional team work between your two teams.

"What would you expect to be the results of your exceptionally good work within teams, and your exceptionally good team work between teams?"

This material is written down individually, and then collated into a joint list for both teams together.

2.2 Participants define the "stakeholders".

2.3 The goals are modified to take account of the needs of the stakeholders.

2.4 The goals are placed in priority order by voting or discussion.

2.5 The key goals are then combined into a statement of the form "The team goal is to ... in such a way that ..."

2.6 Participants individually define the constraints which have to be met.

2.7 The constraints are placed in priority.

2.8 The second part of the goal statement is altered to take account of the constraints.

You will notice that this is the same procedure as before except for the first step.

3. Each group develops a list, or other summary, of what it wishes to communicate to the other group. An empathy list or a self-perception can again be used with advantage. Some of the ways in which this task can be done are described later.

4. Each group documents its material briefly and clearly on newsprint, including its self-perception or empathy list.

5. Each group selects a spokesperson, choosing someone who will faithfully represent the group, but who will also be able to be sympathetic to the other group's point of view. The group then briefs this spokesperson on the most important part of their perceptions of the other group, and of their empathy list or self-perceptions.
6. When the groups meet to exchange perceptions, the spokesperson for one group (Group A) first gives a summary of her group's work. The prepared newsprint is used for illustration. All people are asked to be silent during this exercise, and merely to try to understand what is being said. They are informed that there will be later opportunities to ask questions, and then to respond. You may wish to impose a time limit.
7. After the spokesperson has finished, the members of her own group (Group A) may add brief comments to her report.
8. Members of the other group (Group B) are then permitted brief questions, for clarification only. At this stage, it helps to have a mediator who is ruthless in banning questions which are really responses.
9. The spokesperson for the other group (Group B) now attempts a summary of what the other group has said. (If the task given to the groups is complex, you may want to precede this with a small group meeting to help the spokesperson prepare the summary.)
10. Members of the other group (Group B) are allowed to make brief additions to what the spokesperson has said.
11. The spokesperson for the first group (Group A) clarifies her group's position if Group B does not seem to understand. Group B attempt a restatement. This continues until Group A members are satisfied that Group B understands their position.
12. The groups switch roles. The spokesperson for Group B presents her group's report. Steps 5 to 10 are repeated with groups reversed.
13. Still meeting separately, each group comes up with a set of proposals which they see as likely to meet the joint goals they share with the other team.

14. Each group, using the procedure of steps 5 to 10 above, presents its proposals.
15. Working together, the two teams agree on actions to be carried out.
16. Dates and times for follow up and review are decided.

Self- and other-perception

To bring about the preparation of initial statements from each group a number of tasks can be set. Roger Harrison's questions, already used for role negotiation, work well.

- Do the same of ...
- Do more of ...
- Do less of ...

and, as before, empathy lists are used.

This approach is most suitable when personal relationships between the groups are reasonably good. If personal relationships have deteriorated a lot, you may prefer something which deals directly with relationship issues.

In such an instance, you will probably want to use some task which enables a group to crystallise its view of the other group and of itself. The first step will be to devise this crystallisation. A second step then asks the groups to list the detailed evidence which supports what they have done. Here are some examples of the first part of this.

> *"Choose six adjectives, half of them favourable and half of them unfavourable, to describe the other group; and another six adjectives, half favourable and half unfavourable, to describe your own group. Choose adjectives that successfully capture some important features of the groups."*

> *"Devise a team sport or activity which you think the other group would do superbly. Devise a similar sport or activity at which your own group would excel."*

> *"Devise a motto [or a shield, or a logo, or something like that] for each of the groups."*

The evidence to support this "image" is then given in the form of detailed information about the actions of the other group, and the material outcomes for the group giving the report.

Epilogue

This paper, despite its length, is still too brief to do justice to the topic. I would have preferred to give more examples, and perhaps more attention to the differences between organisational and other settings. However, I have tried to describe the procedures in sufficient detail for you to be able to use them safely. I think you will find it a relatively simple matter to extend the general principles to communication and relationships other than those addressed.

In some respects, such topics as role negotiation and team building exemplify the problems and promises of face-to-face communication. Nowhere is this truer than of conflict resolution, which also epitomises the difficulties that occur within structured relationships: husband and wife, parent and child, manager and subordinate, production manager and marketing manager. During times of obvious conflict the issues are at their most stark, and the consequences of poor conflict management are most apparent.

However, whenever you are looking for a style of communication that leaves both you and another person feeling more satisfied with the outcome and the relationship, I think you will find the material described here will help.

In fact, the principles described here can be more easily applied for prevention rather than for remedy. It is better not to wait until there is a full-blown conflict. Use the procedures whenever a misunderstanding arises, or even when there is no misunderstanding.

Think of it this way. Most issues are more easily resolved when a relationship is already sound. The time to improve a relationship isn't in a crisis — that may be too late.

At the risk of sounding presumptious, I would add two very simple but extremely powerful suggestions, one already mentioned, and one mentioned now for the first time:

- Firstly, whichever of the techniques you are using, try to limit the talk to only one small item (or two when the procedures call for it) at a time. Most procedures will work well if you use them on small enough items. And small items are often as good a vehicle for improving a relationship as are the key ones. And if this isn't enough to restore control, slow down the process.
- Secondly, I urge you to remember that the only thing you can change directly is your own behaviour, and then only one or two things at a time. If ever you want to change anything, from one small aspect of a relationship to the whole world, the starting point is the same. Ask yourself: "What can I do differently to bring about the better outcome that I want?"

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