

TRAINING FOR CREATIVITY **THE ESSENTIAL INGREDIENT OF CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION**

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Creativity and Conflict

Above the overall goal to make human beings humane, happy, and community builders, among the most important aims of education we have found are: a) the transmission of knowledge (the truth is transmitted from older to the younger generation), and b) the cultivation of wisdom and inquiry. In highly traditional societies with a high context culture that limits the individual, education has often emphasized the first. The rapid changes in information technology can turn obsolete the acquisition of quantities of facts and figures. From libraries to the internet, access to the storage of knowledge is growing exponentially. But how to use it to advance or challenge the conventional wisdom is learnt by experiential learning and practice. De Bono, advocating his ‘lateral thinking’ considers that, “Many highly intelligent people are bad thinkers. Intelligence is like the horsepower of a car. A powerful car has the potential to drive at high speed. But you can have a powerful care and drive it badly. Thinking is the driving skill with which each individual drives his or her intelligence.”

All our lives we live with conflict and it can be seen as a destructive or constructive driving force, mostly depending on how it is managed, and on outcomes. If we go the latter way, we can say that conflict is a mutual problem waiting to be solved. I have used sexual intercourse as an analogy to conflict. Exceptionally, some individuals can sublimate sex, or actually try to refrain from it, but both sex and conflict are natural phenomena. Rather than repress sex or conflict, the aspiration should be to make the best use of it. A non-violent outcome is preferable and is best when one tries to channel it to motivate and attempts to obtain maximal progress towards satisfaction for both parties. Likewise – although at a different level – we need to stimulate creativity among our participants through training.

The challenge we face in protracted, disputed argumentation or new, suddenly-thrown-to-us conflictive situations is the ability to move from the factors that determined the particular impasse into a paradigm shift. When conventional wisdom is established, it is not easy to move away from such constraining frameworks. The great inventors throughout the history of humanity have been more often than not ostracized, criticized, and even severely repressed and punished. Dealing with social conflicts requires the same firmness of mind as when a paradigm shift provides the discovery of a new way. But we are now also more in touch with techniques not only for inventing solutions, but also for providing expertise to focus on implementation and how to make such breakthroughs more accessible.

Creativity Training

PHASE ONE – RATIONALE

In Innovative Problem Solving Workshops (IPSWs), when getting into the search for common ground (integrative phase) we speak about the three “CCC” process (cooperation, creativity and consensus). The three phases are interdependent, and success depends on maximizing each “C.” In normal times, in order to increase creativity we need to break out of preconceptions and rigid paradigms that have limited our capacity to invent new options, and to look at problems from another viewpoint.

That need becomes more urgent at times of crisis, when we need to become visionary. Paradoxically, it is at that time that our physiology limits us most – we become nervous, tense, and as a result, shortsighted. Conflict provokes stress and we need to exercise our minds at all times to be able to effectively confront it with daring and innovative ideas.

PHASE FIVE – TRAINING USING INTEGRATIVE TECHNIQUES

There are several techniques that are useful in helping us think creatively, generating better than zero-sum compromises or win/lose outcomes, such as through tossing a coin, arbitration, litigation, or majority vote. There are many techniques and some are combinations of techniques, and include the short list below:

1. ***LATERAL THINKING***: Edward De Bono pioneered the concept and has written many books on the subject, including one on conflict resolution (*Lateral Thinking: Creativity Step by Step*, 1973; *Conflicts*, 1986, etc.). He explains the difference from vertical thinking, where we have developed a habit of “tunnel” vision that impairs us from looking sideways, as blinders prevent a horse from looking other than at the trail straight ahead, when there may be other and better ways. Considering how societies in analogous conflict situations have responded is one important strategy for lateral thinking in peacemaking. Others include checking antipodean (contrasting) conflict situations, and contrasting societies as well (Lesotho, for example, can learn not only from neighboring small Botswana or Swaziland but even from the remote and giant China or India in how they have dealt with conflicts). One exercise to stimulate lateral thinking is to ask participants to say what they can see outside the window – people tend to focus on objects in short or long distance depending on their sight or lens – showing how much more is available beyond what our first impressions and isolated perspective conveyed.

For example, when we were working with academics from the South Caucasus, rather than to focus time and again on their own three conflicts within the region, we prepared a list of attributes that could be learnt from the best practices of autonomy elsewhere (the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, the Generalitat of Catalonia, and the Swedish-speaking Aaland Islands in Finland). When looking at what works elsewhere, and asked to mark the legal, economic, political, symbolic, educational, and other attributes that they consider important and doable in the resolution of their own conflicts, the “Partners” were able to find many that they shared in common.

2. **EXPANDING THE PIE:** Where shortage of resources (land, water, time, money, labor, landing slots, vehicles, etc.) is a critical aspect of the conflict, integrative solutions may be resolved by expanding the pie – i.e., increasing the available resources.

For example, if the conflict is over access to an aquifer with limited water flow, consider if alternate water sources may be available (another aquifer, rain harvesting, piping from a river or lake, desalination of seawater, towing icebergs, trucking in water, etc.). If time is a constraint in a couple’s dispute over vacation plans at the seashore or the mountains, can we make use of the two consecutive weekends or get extra days off and find a place near both? The US promised foreign aid of two billion dollars a year to Egypt and 1.8 billion to Israel as part of a package deal that expedited the Camp David peace agreement after the 1973 war. The Peru/Ecuador peace accord a few years ago was facilitated by a pledge of two billion dollars from Europe, Japan, and North America.

Useful questions to ask are: How can both parties get what they want? Is resource shortage the critical issue? How can the critical resource be expanded?

3. **COMPENSATION:** Compensation can be *specific*, where it remedies the precise costs incurred by one party in acceding to the requirements of the other, or *non-specific*, where compensation is in some unrelated coin. It involves expanding the pie by the trading of differences – it works to the extent that the parties place different values on the items being exchanged.

For example, Lesotho and South Africa were able to resolve a dispute over mountain water resources by agreeing that South Africa will buy most of it from Lesotho (approx \$70m a year). In the conflict over shares of water in the Nile River, Egypt could agree to stop water-intensive rice farming in exchange for a long-term rice import agreement at cheaper prices. However, offering money or

goods to compensate for loss of love, respect, recognition, or security is unlikely to be acceptable; better to offer compensation more in kind – intangibles for intangibles, tangibles for tangibles. Nor is it possible to compensate for non-satisfaction of the basic human needs (security, recognition, survival) – they are not negotiable.

Useful questions (perhaps indirect or addressed to outsiders with knowledge of the other party) are: If human needs are at stake, what form of compensation might address that need? What does one party value that the other can supply? How valuable is this to them, in comparison to the degree of loss experienced in conceding on the original issue? What normative or legal constraints are there on paying or compensating for the concessions?

4. **LOG ROLLING:** Each party concedes on issues that are of low priority to self and high priority to the other, so each gets what they deem most important of what is at stake. This disaggregating of preferences is a form of compensation (trading of differences) that can apply only when there are several issues in dispute that can be traded off against each other.

For example, just coming back from a workshop in Alexandria, Egypt, focusing on the dispute between upstream and downstream riparian in the river Nile, all could benefit from a better understanding of the value each side places on different uses of the river. Participants representing each party in a second track workshop might assign values (total 100 is the maximal score) among the different uses as follows (hypothetical):

New River (preferentes)

	Alephland		Betland
Personal consumption	16		15
Tourism	12		15
Irrigation	28		10
Nature preservation	12		4
Commerce, mineral water	9		12
Fishing	6		17
Transport	12		7
Electricity	5		20
<i>Total</i>	100	[68]	100 [74]

In both cases, the result is better than parting the river’s water 50/50 each. For instance, irrigation is Alephland’s highest priority, and to limit the cost of this in

lost volume, Betland might agree to provide the latest drip irrigation technology to their farmers, and at the same time extract concessions.

It is important to stress that in negotiations we often have to accept the “second best” as reciprocal concessions to the other party, and then useful questions could be: Which issues are of higher and lower priority needs to each party? Where are there differences in their priorities?

5. ***COST CUTTING***: This is also a form of compensation, since specific compensation is usually designed to cut costs. Understanding the costs each party potentially faces requires understanding the values and needs underlying their demands. An example from Latin America: following the 1995 Cenepa War we hosted stakeholders from both countries. If the main reason Ecuador is insisting on its right to some territory in dispute with Peru is to hold on to the status of an Amazon basin country (which carries certain riparian rights), then perhaps Peru can offer to preserve some or all of those rights in exchange for the disputed land. In an arms race, there may be a point of entrapment in which each has enough weapons to destroy the other, but if the other continues to build up arms there is a psychological need to match it or to be “winning” by staying ahead. Here an arms agreement may help cut costs for both and avoid economic collapse.

Useful questions are: What costs are posed for each party by the other’s proposal? How can these costs be eliminated or mitigated?

6. ***BRIDGING***: Here neither party achieves their initial demands, but a new option is devised that satisfies the most important needs or interests behind those demands. Bridging typically stems from a reframing of the issues to focus on satisfying underlying needs and higher priority interests.

For example, if the wife’s main interest in the beach is swimming, and mountain waters are too cold for that, the couple may agree to vacation at a quiet, wooded lakeside resort. Lower priority interests (mountain views, boardwalk fries) may have to be let go. Or in a dispute over opening a library window, one wanting fresh air and the other worrying that the draft will give him a cold, both needs can be largely met by opening the window in the adjoining room. Another example: if a second piece of land in dispute between Ecuador and Peru cannot be given up by either side because of the need to honor the great numbers on each side that have died there, an agreement to establish a bi-national memorial park may meet the critical needs of both sides.

Useful questions are: What are each party's needs and interests? What are the priorities among these interests? What are the deeper interests or needs behind the high-priority interests? How can both sets of needs and deeper interests best be satisfied?

7. **BACK CASTING:** If you follow the "shared vision" exercise and project thirty years ahead to find some common ground in the future (see Davies and Kaufman, p. 218), then the shared vision can provide inspiration for identifying what steps need to be taken within twenty years by perhaps erasing some of the objectives of the longer list. Then move back to ten years, and finally to one year. It is often easier to agree on some compromise in the long term, leaving the implementation to future generations. But we can slowly bring the participants to take some of the vision to the present.

For example, we have done this with Chinese, Burmese, and Thai participants when starting a process of consensus-building about the Salween River that they shared. Perhaps inspired by the agreements on the neighboring Mekong River which includes five nations, the "vision statement" is inspirational and provides a goal which we aspire to achieve.

Useful questions are: What are the differences between a "mission statement" and a "vision statement"? How can we address our shared long-term concerns without giving up our own urgent needs?

8. **ACTION-FORCING EVENT:** So far, the suggestions for "thinking out of the box" relate to processes rather than an "out of the blue" unexpected activity aimed at producing some kind of a constructive shock that can disengage a stagnated situation into a rapid movement forward. While paradigm shifts require the cumulative effort of elaborated thinking strategies, we are now moving about how a single action, an Action Forcing Event (AFE), can be a particular event planned as a breakthrough out of a stagnated situation.

This event, involving the key leaders of parties to a conflict and/or a dramatic grassroots situation, is generated to move up the attention and concern of the opposed leaders from inaction to action, and to facing the urgent need to jointly find common ground. Self-immolation as a nonviolent act of protest, or the unexpected statement or visit of a dignitary to the capital of a country with which one's own country is at war (such as President Sadat's spectacular and unexpected conciliatory visit to Jerusalem), are gestures that transcend much more than lengthy speeches. The idea is to trigger action that moves a conflictive issue up to the top agenda of the policy makers. The AFE needs to be carefully

planned, if possible by peace builders from both sides, in consultation with the decision makers' staffs. Details are of the essence for success.

Additional examples/references to AFEs which have been in the news are:

- “During Tuesday's briefing, Levin said the July 2011 date to start withdrawing U.S. troops from Afghanistan has been the ‘action-forcing mechanism which it was intended to be.’” (The Huffington Post: Obama Considering Major Boost to Afghan Security Forces, Armed Services Chairman Says)
- “The key action-forcing tool was supposed to be the threat of deep spending cuts.” (The Wall Street Journal: Deficit Panel Folds Its Tent)
- “And to do something that may be an action-forcing event that would bring them back to the table, if he [President Obama] decides to do it I will support it.” (Think Progress » Clinton: If Obama Offers Peace Plan, ‘I Will Support It’)

9. **CROWDSOURCING:** This is a process that involves outsourcing tasks to a distributed group of people. It can occur both online and offline, and the difference between crowdsourcing and ordinary outsourcing is that a task or problem is outsourced to an undefined public rather than a specific body, such as paid employees. The problem or conflict is shared with a large number of people, requesting suggestions for solutions. Some guidelines can be provided, but the main encouragement is to think out of the box, to seek a paradigm shift.

For instance, in a workshop at Haifa University with the participation of graduate students consisting of Arab and Jewish citizens from Israel and other international graduate students, the objective was to search for common ground on the issue of the Israeli national anthem, Hatikvah. The words relate to the Jewish wish to return to Zion, while more than 20% of the country is native Arab. Several innovative ideas came out, and one was to request that the main student union (and Arab groups) suggest words, music, and ideas in general for a Haifa University song or anthem, not yet in existence. Many questions arose, such as how to share with the contributors all the ideas, and how to ensure that using social networks could be a constructive build up of suggestions rather than the often recriminatory discourse of adversarial supporters of both sides.

PHASE SIX – TRAINING FOR BRAINSTORMING

The brainstorming normally lasts from thirty to sixty minutes, depending upon the number of Partners and the level of previous knowledge of the issues. But it is best not to strictly limit the time, as long as the flow of suggestions continues. Ideas should be stated briefly, without justification – one minute per idea. Two participants or facilitators should

write down the ideas with proponents calling on the recorders alternately, so that the writing down of an idea will not slow the flow of ideas. If it seems as though the group is running out of ideas and the facilitators would like to encourage more, they may announce how many minutes remain in the session, so that an extra effort can be made to generate more. Quantity is no guarantee of quality, but a larger harvest may include more powerful and creative suggestions.

It is difficult for many of the participants to refrain from offering comments or body language, either positive or negative, about another's ideas. For this reason, it is critical that the facilitators have the necessary skills to keep this activity on track and not allow any editorializing, including their own. It is easy to reassure the participants that there will be an opportunity for this at the appropriate time. If we sense that the Partners are not still in a brainstorming mood, we may be reminded that this exercise is designed to generate win-win situations, so that neither side will feel as though it has lost something while the other has gained.¹ It is also important to remind the Partners that unconventional ideas can generate solutions through the cross-fertilization of ideas.

A Peruvian colleague has suggested another method in the event of a second brainstorming session. This involves giving each participant five large index cards and asking them to write in large characters (with different-colored markers) one idea on each card. After about ten minutes of separate idea-creation, the participants read out one idea at a time and post them in different groupings on the wall.

Principles for Brainstorming:

1. All ideas are encouraged;
2. Record them for display;
3. No criticisms, justifications or discussion of the merits;
4. Avoid passing judgment either orally or through body language;
5. All is confidential;
6. Ideas are depersonalized by not attributing them to the proponent;
7. Do not focus on substantive differences;
8. Keep the flow going;
9. OK to associate new ideas, adding a "footnote" or "hitchhike" idea;
10. Combine related propositions or expand propositions with improved options;
11. OK to change the flow to new lines of ideas;
12. "Think big," "the sky is the limit" – encourage daring ideas, freewheeling imagination;
13. Use techniques for creative thinking ("lateral thinking," "back casting," "expanding the pie," "compensation," "logrolling," "bridging," etc.)

There is no need at this point to label their groupings. Only later, when the participants are to be divided into smaller working groups for quality control and re-formulation, are these lists divided according to clear criteria. This second method has the advantage that ideas are normally better drafted; the first method provides more of a creative stimulus through the collective enthusiasm of generating ideas together.

Only after completing the ideas creation process can we move with the Partners into the subsequent phase of evaluating, prioritizing, and re-formulating the suggestions. We are now moving from quantity to quality and from creativity into critical thinking. Once this exercise is completed and before the break, all participants should mark on the charts those ideas they consider to be worthwhile and useful (for example, ++ for a very good idea, + for a good idea, etc.). This will serve to indicate to the small groups what the priorities of the larger group are, and which ideas to focus more on. A long break between this phase and the next will be helpful, so that participants may recover from the intensive effort of brainstorming, and switch to a different set of thinking skills.

PHASE SEVEN – EXPERIMENTING WITH THE USE OF NEW CREATIVE THINKING TECHNIQUES

Before moving ahead, revisiting problems or other issues in the conflicts discussed earlier or tabling new problems can provide the participants with the opportunity to apply the new techniques before tackling the main issues dividing them. Dividing into small groups of four, they can address the problems, prepare a report, and share their results with the whole group.

PHASE EIGHT – DEBRIEF

A final debrief brings out the lessons learned and lays the groundwork for the workshop to consider the participants' own conflict. We expect the participants to come up with most of the conclusions, feeling empowered to continue to be creative in dealing together across the divide, as a team, with innovative ideas. It is important to the facilitator to realize not only that experiential training is better than lecturing, but also that in order to be successful we need the time to get the "Partners" to both learn new skills and also to get into the mood of "thinking out of the box." In other words, you cannot clap your hands and say, "let's now be creative" – there is no immediate Pavlovian reflex. Time and again we need to be reminded of the advantages of lateral thinking and the other methods that expand our imagination. And only when sensing that the participants are ready can we move into an effective brainstorming. Something similar happened to me when talking to Moshe and earlier, when seeing the experimental school in its first years. It took time to translate this learning into a unit for people in conflict. Creativity training was an area that we did not address as political scientists. But as in other more developed areas of science,

much of the advance occurs when moving out of the conventional methods. We are only at the beginning of the process; education of people in conflict is marching in!!!

¹ There is a fable from China that illustrates precisely the differences between win-win and zero-sum situations, and it might be appropriate to share it with the Partners. A man from China once was given his wish to see the difference between heaven and hell before he died. When he visited hell, he saw tables covered with mouth-watering foods of all kinds, but all the people there were hungry and angry. Although there was food, they were forced to sit one meter from the table using chopsticks one meter long that made it impossible for them to get any food into their mouths. When the man went to heaven, he was very surprised because the situation was exactly the same, except for the fact that people were well fed and happy. What is the difference, the story asks? In hell people were trying to feed themselves. In heaven they were feeding each other.