

Extract from a paper for the key symposium on anthropological contributions to Conflict Resolution, Atlanta, Georgia, April 1994

Practical work in Conflict Resolution training in a variety of cultural settings led Pyotr Patrushev to search for training tools and approaches which could be used cross-culturally. People who are subjected to stressful conflict situations (such as prolonged ethnic conflicts) manifest a tendency for stereotyped actions and behaviours. The author proposes an Eriksonian schema of developmental changes for the cross-cultural analysis of conflict-resolving and conflict-provoking behaviours. The rebuilding of dysfunctional skills using such approaches may lead to a "second order change" affecting personal values and attitudes. Implications for conflict theory and practice are discussed.

During CR training seminars in Russia, Lebanon and Israel, the following behaviours were observed among participants in relation to conflict:

Withdrawal or aggressive confrontation; manipulation; attempts to rescue; victimisation; outbursts of anger; remarks or behaviours manifesting suspicion; persecuting behaviours; behaviours manifesting superiority and a feeling of contempt for the enemy; formation of in- and out-groupings; uncritical following of a leader; uncritical following of a dominant in-group propaganda message; dismissive attitudes towards out-group ideas and proposals.

Although one can hypothesise that such behaviours are pre-conditioned during childhood and reinforced during mature years, a further complication factor could be prolonged and repeated stress to which people are subjected in traumatic conflict situations (such as the one in Lebanon). This would make it even more difficult to change such behaviours and underlying attitudes.

As a result of CR training, conflict-provoking behaviours were modified to a significant degree. The following behaviours were observed after CR training:

Attempts to discuss topics previously deemed too "dangerous"; ability to change roles with the opponent; attempts at self-criticism and criticism of the dominant groups defences and propaganda; attempts to discourage manipulation of others and notice it in themselves; attempts to physically approach the former enemy in a friendly or neutral way; attempts to refrain from "rescuing" behaviours and maintain greater objectivity in the face of a threat to an in-group member; greater openness and respect for the opponent's views, manifested by attentiveness in listening and paraphrasing; greater trust for and respect toward trainers manifested by reduction in critical and challenging remarks and increase in questions, which indicated willingness to learn new skills.

However, it was noticed that some of the participants, despite repeated CR training, easily lapsed into old patterns in situations approaching real life (i.e. during an argument over space for playing soccer during a seminar break). There was little evidence of active listening or appropriate assertiveness (two of the most basic and perhaps most important CR skills) being used during informal events. Perhaps more alarmingly, despite going along with the prevailing mood and ideology of trainers during formal sessions, some participants voiced scepticism over the applicability of this knowledge in the political and social environment to which they were returning.

These observations led to questioning and a search for methods to best institute second order changes:

1. For CR skills to become useful and enduring in realistic situations of conflict do they need to be grounded in attitudinal and values change?
2. If so, what is the connection between conflict-provoking behaviours, attitudes and values?
3. How are attitudes and values developed in a growing personality and how can one repair the damage, once it has occurred?

Elements of developmental psychology were introduced into CR training to address the formation of attitudes, beliefs and values, which may underlie conflict-provoking and conflict-resolving behaviours, and to experiment with some corrective exercises.

For instance, the following schema was applied to a psychohistorical and developmental analysis of a significant leader (i.e. Joseph Stalin), to show how political views and behaviours stemmed from early family history and childhood trauma. The relationship between addictive behaviours (including addiction to power and violence), defence mechanisms, social and family roles and early trauma were described.

Stages in Development and

The ideas for this table of developmental stages and corrective exercises came largely from the works of Erik H Erikson and John Bradshaw¹.

STAGE 1

Age: 0-9 months

Basic polarity: trust versus mistrust

Relationship issue: healthy narcissism, co-dependency.

Healthy basis for CR skills: trust in the world and oneself, faith in ability to have own needs met.

Impaired development: lack of trust in oneself and others, projection and introjection of hostile or angry wishes and emotions; ease of projection onto external enemy or an ability to "swallow propaganda whole".

STAGE 2

Age: 9-18 months (exploratory) and 18 months to 3 years (separation)

Relationship issue: birth of the self; counter-dependence.

Healthy basis for CR skills: healthy assertiveness, ability to hold and let go, being able to deal with anger in others without losing faith in their goodwill, ability to stay with the conflict without fighting or fleeing.

Impaired development: lack of balance, over-controlled or prone to rage, tendency to isolation and addiction.

¹ Erik H Erikson, *Childhood and Society* (New York, W W Norton & Co, 1963) and John Bradshaw, *Homecoming: Reclaiming and Championing Your Inner Child* (New York: Bantam Books, 1992)

[Ed.: John Bradshaw's Family of Origin work is now on video, audio cassette and further books. Are you interested in becoming an agent for videos and audios? Contact John Bradshaw Events (02) 380-6022.]

CR Skill Acquisition

STAGE 3

Age: 3-6 years

Basic polarity: Initiative versus guilt

Relationship issue: Independence

Healthy basis for CR skills: Strong sense of identity, curiosity and willingness to resolve conflict, sense of responsibility for one's actions, tolerance to differences in people and opinions.

Impaired development: lack of identity, development of victim, persecutor and rescuer roles. Muddled communication - mixed messages to oneself and others.

STAGE 4

Age: 6 years to puberty

Basic polarity: Industry versus inferiority

Relationship issue: Interdependence, co-operation

Healthy basis for CR skills: co-operation, with a healthy sense of competition.

Impaired development: chronic sense of inferiority or false superiority, leading to the strengthening of either victim, persecutor or rescuer roles.

STAGE 5

Age: 13-26

Basic polarity: Strong identity versus role confusion

Relationship issue: Independence from family

Healthy basis for CR skills: Separation from roles imposed by family into independence expressed as a sense of identity, career and social mission. Ability to trust and to co-operate with others in balance with the need to take care of oneself and one's family, to express oneself and make a unique personal contribution to society.

Impaired development: negative ("anti-hero") identity, rebelliousness, delinquent behaviour, identification with radical or violent subcultures and causes, cult leaders and extremists.

The degree of initial mistrust manifested by participants towards the training program in different cultural settings is significant. In Lebanon, where the training seminar was conducted for university, college and school teachers, and some representatives of community organisations, there was a significant degree of suspicion towards foreign trainers and a Western-inspired training methodology. The group, with some exceptions, was particularly resistant towards any attempts to move the understanding of conflict from the political arena into the psychological one, with the degree of self-awareness and self-criticism implicit in such an approach.

Resistance manifested as avoiding the most challenging sessions, refusing to take part in some exercises, and concentrating on verbal content of instructions while avoiding the exercise itself. Some trainers who had not done any work on the psychology of conflict also resisted any attempts to "psychologise" the conflict, or introduce any elements of psychohistorical or psychoanalytic interpretation.

In Israel, where participants were mostly social workers, psychologists and psychiatrists, the psychological interpretation of conflict was received with much greater readiness, although its personal, rather than abstract or collective implications were also met with resistance.

In Russia, where training was conducted mostly for representatives of Southern republics (including some Russian Cossacks from those regions), the psychological interpretations were met with curiosity and also provoked criticism and resistance when applied personally.

Thus, it can be summarised that developmental approaches to CR were met with interest, but resistances began as soon as such material was broached in relation to participants themselves or their particular conflict situation.

However, it would seem obvious, for example, that teaching win/win to a person grossly deficient in Stage 1 skills is a difficult task. Basic mistrust and suspicion towards other people and life itself is maintained, unless early experiences are relieved, discharged and new attitudes formed. It is believed that superficially learned skills create only a "first order" change, which may break down under stress.

Corrective exercises can be used in CR training to affect underlying conflict-provoking and conflict-resolving attitudes. To integrate skills, values, attitudes to other people and society, and self-awareness, the author introduced the training model called "The Wheel of Change". This was first formally tried during a Platigorsk seminar in the Caucasus, in the South of the Russian Federation. The "Wheel of Change" model can incorporate imagery, supportive group work, NLP, non-dominant hand writing and drawing, voice dialogue and other techniques.

This approach challenges traditional CR thinking and practice:

1. Some approaches to CR skills training may result in only superficial learning which does not affect underlying values and attitudes and thus causes only a non-durable "first order" change.
2. The developmental approach requires trainers to be skilled in and sensitive to facilitating attitudinal change, using a range of therapeutic models.
3. It may be a fallacy to expect that participants would easily accept Western approaches to CR and peace-making (although most funding for CR training in the countries discussed comes from the West). Much deeper ground work needs to be done at a personal level and at the level of exploration of cultural beliefs and values. As the euphoria and novelty of CR training in intercultural settings wears off, more questions as to the efficacy of superficial approaches in this area will inevitably arise.
4. The training approach described above places much greater demand on CR trainers to be familiar with local culture, language and mentality. It was very useful to use local mythology and its analysis to deepen the discussion of psychological and individual roots of conflict.

The hypothesis of continuity and causality in relation to childhood development and future conflict-resolving skills seems useful for furthering discussion of the methodology of CR training. Purely political and intellectual approaches to Conflict Resolution and CR training have seemed limited in effecting sustainable change.

*Pyotr welcomes responses to his paper (042) 94-1696, fax (042) 94-3797.
[Ed.: His comments point up the importance of trainers having at their fingertips the material in CRN's "Beyond Conflict" workshop.] ♦*