Addressing conflict in development: using ICA's Technology of Participation.

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The Technology of Participation (ToP) is the name now given to the body of methods, processes and techniques that embody the approach taken by the Institute of Cultural Affairs (ICA) over the past 50 years. The approach was designed to empower local citizens to be involved in the decisions that affected their lives and has now broadened to include not just the decision-making processes of communities, but now includes the state and other public authorities, companies, organisations and other entities.

History and Background

There were four main influences on the development of ToP which stemmed from ICA's practice of research, training and demonstration:

1. The findings of a global research project, in which several hundred staff and volunteers from around the world constructed a model of how society works. Using Social Process Triangles [7], the model was intended to describe and analyse what society looks like when it is working well, what the different drivers, dynamics and processes are within society, and what efforts could be made to support positive change and challenge negative change. These triangles were subsequently adapted for use within organisations [12].

   The key finding of this research was that there was significant imbalance between the three main dynamics at play in society- the economic (foundational), the political (ordering) and the cultural (which gives meaning), with the two former dynamics dominating the social process. ICA was set up therefore, to strengthen the cultural dynamic by being "concerned with human factor in world development", thereby giving greater weight to "the images, patterns and shared understandings which allow people to do something together". It is these cultural dynamics that need to be considered in order to build any sustainable pattern of change or development. Further, there is a conviction that long-term, sustainable development happens only when people grasp the significance of their own lives in the larger scheme of things...when they actively

participate in the changes taking place around them instead of merely being targets of that change. Within that, one principle prevails- the desire to release the creativity of the people involved and to allow them to help shape their own destiny [3].

2. ICA was originally a programme of the Ecumenical Institute which was "concerned with the kind of adult education that would wake people up to the limits, possibilities and purpose of life." [9, p250]. One of its main training courses was Religious Studies 1, and many of the philosophical underpinnings of ToP stemmed from that course.

   ToP and its predecessors do not derive from one particular school of thought or strand of philosophy: theologians, philosophers, sociologists, psychologists all contributed to the thinking and development of the methods [9, p251; 11, pp27-30]

3. With the establishment of ICA and the move towards a more secular role, a community based project in Fifth City, a ghetto area of Chicago, was launched to put ICA's lessons and teachings into practice and to provide a demonstration of social transformation. It was in this and subsequent community development projects that ICA established around the world that many of the ToP tools were refined, tried and tested.

4. Since 1988 ICA has focused more on building up a culture of participation in communities and organisations. This ongoing experience, gained across the world, continues to serve as a source of wisdom to inform our practice and improve our methods and approach. Such practice has not, however, been carried out in isolation and there has been a continuing and growing interest in seeing how ToP can learn from, contribute to or be used in conjunction with other participatory approaches which have been emerging over the last few decades (e.g. Open Space Technology, Participatory Learning and Action, Future Search, Appreciative Enquiry, Solutions Focus, etc.)

The thinking, background and practice of ToP, therefore, was not explicitly "conflict" orientated. It is not that the methodology fails to recognise that there are differences between people, ideas, goals or values but rather it does not specifically label these differences as "conflict".

Example 1: Villa El Salvador Industrial Park, Peru

The 288 hectare Industrial Park had all of its' infrastructure installed and yet stood vacant for years due to political conflict. Meanwhile, there were hundreds of small industries operating in nearby family homes. The challenge was to form the people into industrial guilds and empower them to call for an end to the conflicts blocking the opening of the Industrial Park. In order to implement this project, the United Nations contracted the services of the ICA. This led to the formation of six industrial guilds which each made their strategic plans, and to this day maintain their separate areas in the Industrial Park. Construction and operation of a small demonstration factory making fresh cheese was the catalytic action which released the political conflict when confronted with responsible citizen organization, thereby allowing the implementation of the Industrial Park to move forward, with the assistance of the United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO). Today the Industrial Park of Villa el Salvador houses over 1,000 industries which provide employment to over 20,000 people. (http://www.ica-peru.org/en_proyectos-urban.htm)

Characteristics

Two concepts, that form part of the philosophy behind the methods, are relevant here:

Disciplined Lucidity- the need to live in reality, to recognise that life is as it is (not the way it ought to be), with all its ups and downs, its wonder and its challenges, its limits and its possibilities. In this context we live in a constant "crunch" between what drives us (our needs, desires, motivations, inspirations) and forces that prevent us from achieving those things or, even if we do achieve them, which prevent us from holding onto them [9,p34].

Continual Affirmation- the Yes to all of Life- which challenges us to accept that I am received, to see life is good, the past is approved, and that all is possible (the future is open). ToP facilitators seek to affirm perspectives and viewpoints, enabling them to hold the space between differences but working to bring those differences together in the interests of a joint way forward.

ToP practice reflects these principles. The interest is in bringing people together and, by creating the right environment (and) by using effective group facilitation methods, to enable

them to discuss and plan together and to progress- in attitude, behaviour or action (see Example 3). In addition ToP reflects five key principles or values [4, p1.7]:

a) *Inclusive Participation*: by inviting and sustaining the participation of all members of a group. The importance of each member of the group and their contribution is recognised

b) *Teamwork & Collaboration*: fostering team spirit to get a task done in the most effective, efficient and economical way

c) *Individual & Group Creativity*: bringing out the best of each person's rational and intuitive capabilities by encouraging dialogue

d) *Ownership & Action*: positions the group to take action on decisions owned and supported by members of the group. Group ownership of decisions moves the group toward action.

e) *Reflection & Learning*: fosters individual and group reflection and learning at every step of the process and implementation.

Significantly, the "way in" is often to have people develop a shared vision- what they want to have achieved in a specific timeframe- so that any blocks or obstacles can be analysed within the context of such a vision and strategies designed to address them. The assumption is that you do not necessarily have to dig deep into the past to unearth and address deeper issues, but rather the group will be able to overcome their differences by working together towards an agreed vision or to create an alternative model which can then replace the version that is causing the difficulties.

Methods and Tools

Throughout the 1990s ICA Canada carried out a thorough analysis of using ToP in high conflict situations. Several stages of a process were identified, now called the Phases of Conciliation [2]. The approach uses the energy inherent in systemic conflict to drive the participants of multi-stakeholder, multi-topic conflicts toward positive solutions and working relationships. Different ToP tools can be used at each stage, so the phases of conciliation can also be used as a design process for addressing large and small scale conflict (see Examples 2 and 3).

The seven steps are Initiating the Dialogue; Clarifying the Situation; Expressing the Experience; Articulating the Substantial Issues; Generating the Options; Creating Resolution; Planning for Implementation (see Figure 1).
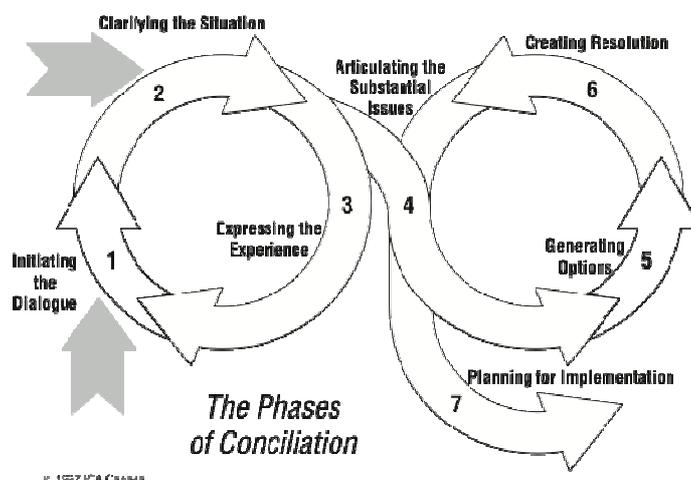

Figure 1: The Phases of Conciliation (ICA Canada, 1997)

Example 2: Ontario Hydro and Wahta Mohawks First Nation, Canada

ICA Canada was engaged to facilitate negotiations over grievances related to the construction and operation of a hydro electric generating station in the Wahta Mohawks First Nation in Canada. The hydro company had planned hydro lines across land sacred to the Mohawks. This mirrored decades of history of land grievances and threatened to stop the hydro project. ICA Canada was engaged to work with representatives of Hydro One and Ontario Power Generation and the community leadership of Wahta Mohawks First Nation. Wayne and Jo Nelson facilitated a team of 12 people over three years affecting 400 First Nations members and the Corporate Management of Ontario Power Generation and Hydro One.

The three year project involved designing, facilitating and documenting a process to reach a commonly agreed upon resolution of the grievances. The entire project used elements of negotiation, conflict resolution, cross cultural communication, facilitation design, process facilitation, documentation, and report writing. ToP methods were used through the project. The process resulted in a settlement that integrated the perspectives of the parties involved and was ratified by Hydro management and the community members. (http://top-facilitators.com/serendipity)

Example 3: NorthEastern Ontario Tobacco Summit

A steering committee funded by several cities in NorthEastern Ontario decided to hold a major conference, the NorthEastern Ontario Tobacco Summit, (NEOTS) to determine a region wide strategy to deal with smoking. ICA's Bill Staples was hired to design and facilitate the conference specifically because of our conciliation approach and our ability to work with the heavy conflict which would undoubtedly occur during the conference. The only prerequisite was there should be outcomes that could be acted upon by everyone. Six months of prep work promoted the conference throughout the region of approximately 200 by 400 kilometers. A team of epidemiologists were hired by the steering committee to evaluate the outcomes of the conference.

After the three day conference of 185 people opened with speeches and presentations, participants were divided into small mixed teams to interview each other using a ToP Focused Conversation on the impacts of tobacco on their lives. Impacts ranged from death, to large expenses to set up smoking sections in restaurants. The Consensus Workshop Method was used to determine fourteen workshop topics for the next section of the conference. Fourteen teams met to determine the key questions they had about their assigned topic, using the Focused Conversation Method. This was followed by a major plenary of reports. The fourteen teams then reconvened, with some reshuffling of participants, to make recommendations on how to answer the questions that had been raised.

During the second plenary, a Consensus Table of 5 participants were assigned to listen carefully and determine points of consensus they heard emerging. The five points were: involve youth in all future planning; all future research should be jointly done; 100% smoke-free bylaws should be enacted, except for ceremonial uses of Tobacco by First Nations; a coordinating body should be formed; lobby for provincial funding for enforcement, education, cessation and prevention.

Twelve geographic teams were formed to create action plans for each of the consensus points, including stakeholder frameworking, goals and timelines. (http://top-facilitators.com/serendipity)

In addition to this framework various principles and tools which exist within ToP which assist in the understanding, analysis and resolving or transforming of conflict:

A. Rational and Experiential Aims

When designing a participatory process, after the situational analysis, ICA's approach is to clarify the purpose and the people involved before going on to consider the design of the process itself. As part of this, the purpose is divided between two distinct areas: *the rational aim*, which is the product or output of the process (e.g. a decision taken, a plan created, a topic explored) and *the experiential aim*, which puts focus on the participants- what do we want them to experience during this process, and how do we want them to be different as a result of being part of it [4, p2.6]. Examples of this would be that people are more committed to implementing a plan, they are more aware of a topic, they feel more of a team, they take ownership of the decisions they make. This simple device helps facilitators make the important distinction between the two types of objectives, and clarifies (through the experiential aim) the reason why taking a participatory approach is vital.

B. Image Change

Based on the work of Kenneth Boulding in the 1950s [1], ICA took the notion of how we operate out of images (see Figure 2) to develop an approach to facilitation which builds on the theory and created a tool to enable groups and individuals to manage change. The fundamentals of Boulding's thinking were:

- Everyone operates out of images
- Images govern behaviour
- Messages shape images
- Images can be changed
- Changed images change behaviour

Given the importance that images and perceptions (both at an individual and societal level) can have in fuelling and sustaining conflict, this is an important tool in assisting people to both recognise
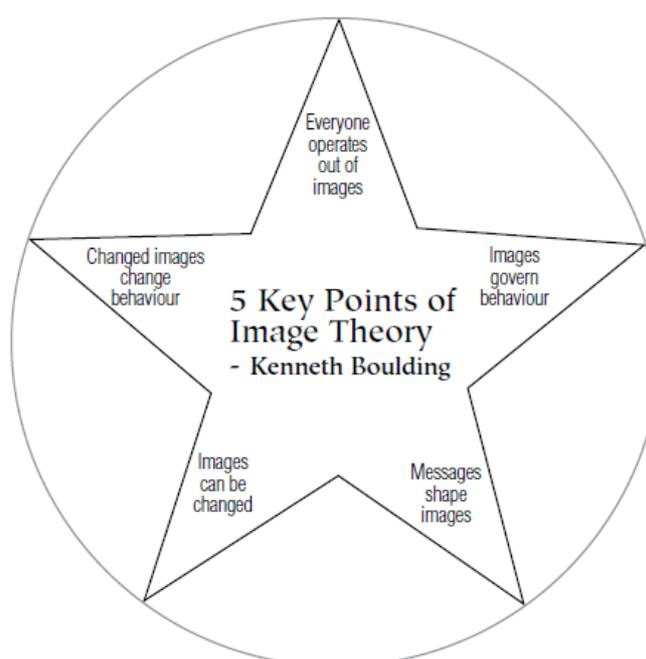

Figure 2: Image Theory (Boulding, 1969)

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the images that they are operating out of, what messages are holding those images in place, and then to think through what needs to be done in order to change those images.

C. ORID/Focused Conversation Method

Based on a model of human behaviour, ORID is a framework which informs all of the ToP methods (most explicitly the Focused Conversation Method) and indeed the whole approach (see Figure 3) [8].

Put simply, the model suggests that, as human beings, we tend to respond similarly to what is going on around us. Firstly, we pick up data and information through our senses: sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch. As we do that, we react- we like it, we don't like it, we are surprised, we are uncomfortable. We then analyse what is happening, what we have learnt, why it is significant, valuable or important for us. Finally we decide "now what?" In the light of what went on, my reaction to it, my understanding of the situation and its relevance to me, what do I do now, how have my opinions changed, what opinion have I formed. ICA has given the names Objective, Reflective, Interpretive and Decisional to these four levels, hence the acronym ORID.

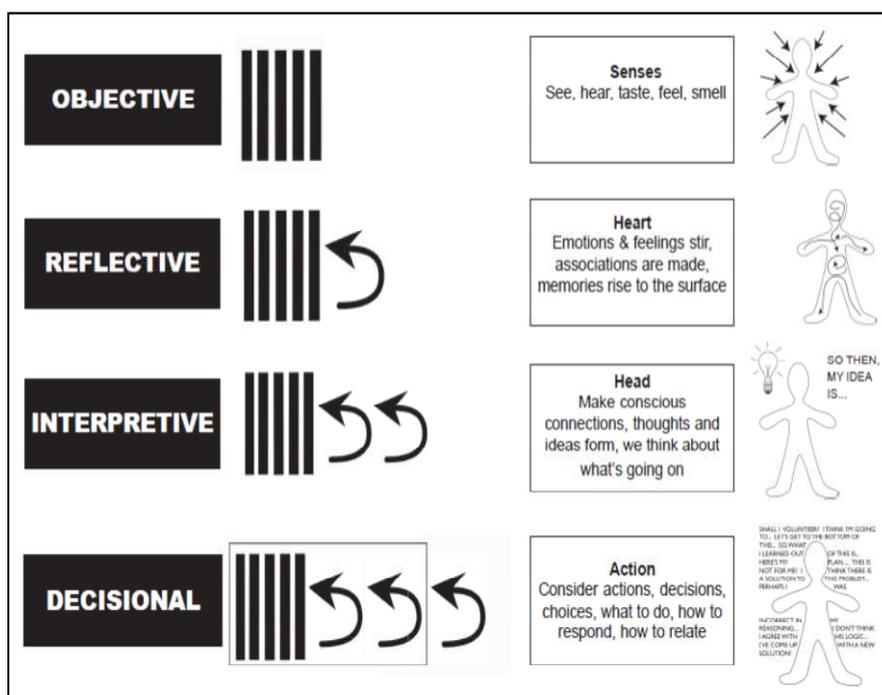In the Focused Conversation Method, questions are formulated for each of the four levels in order to enable a group to reach a point of shared awareness about the issue or topic. In some cases it may lead to agreement, but overall the intent is more for people to have a deeper understanding of both the topic and the different views

Figure 3: The ORID model

In the context of conflict, ORID can also provide a larger framework which people can relate to- it feels natural, it recognises the need to address all the different aspects so that, even if people come in angry and frustrated (Reflective level) the method helps us to remember to return to the Objective level to see what it is that is causing this emotion (see Figure 4 for how the Stages of Conciliation reflect ORID).
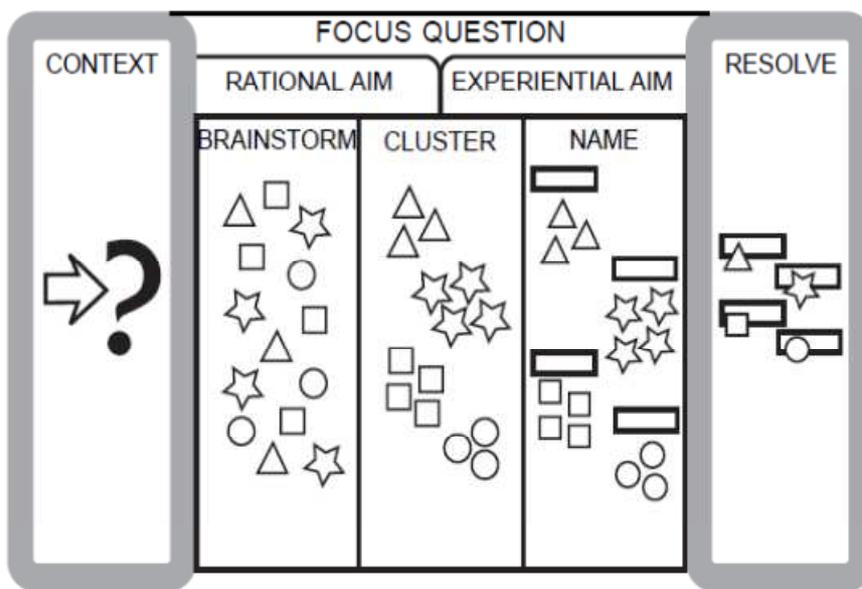
Initiating the Dialogue Clarifying the Situation	O
Expressing the Experience	R
Articulating the Substantial Issues Generating the Options	I
Creating Resolution Planning for Implementation	D

Figure 4: Linking ORID to the Stages of Conciliation [2]

D. The Consensus Workshop

Together with the Focused Conversation Method, the Consensus Workshop is at the heart of the ToP methodology [10]. As the name implies, it is designed to enable a group with different perspectives and ideas to work through an agreed topic to the point where they are able to reach agreement. The method has five main stages- setting the context and the focus question, brainstorming of ideas, clustering those ideas according to agreed criteria, naming the different clusters to articulate the consensus and then reflecting on the product and resolving the next steps.

Figure 5: The Consensus Workshop process

E. Participatory Strategic Planning (PSP)

Reflecting the underlying principles and values of ToP, this process has been designed to enable a group, community or organisation to develop a longer term framework which provides guidance and direction for them in the next 3-5 years [11]. Recognising the (often) rapidly changing environment in which people and organisations now have to operate, the emphasis is less on providing detailed plans and actions for the whole period (which can be quickly overtaken by events), but rather on developing a set of agreed strategies or
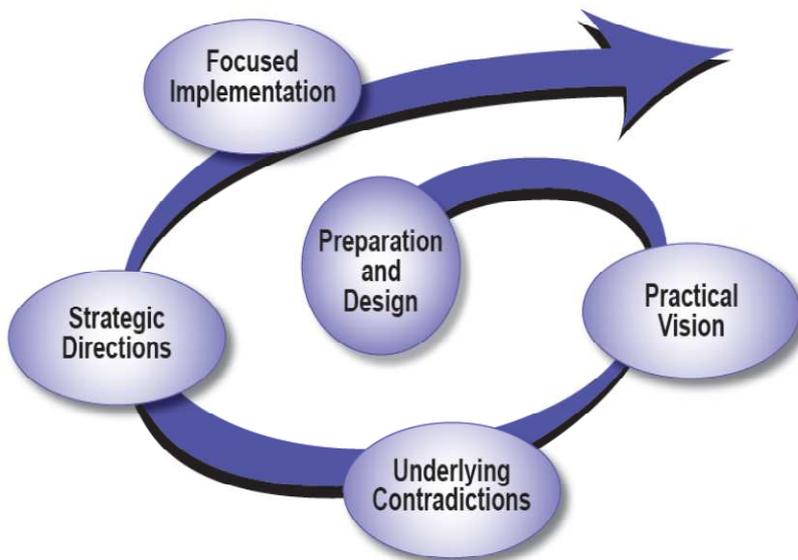
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Figure 6: The ToP Participatory Strategic Planning process

directions which are responsive to changes and which provide a framework into which more detailed plans can be incorporated as progress is made. In addition, the PSP process seeks to be dynamic, enlivening and engaging the energy of the group; to be realistic and inclusive by bringing "the whole system into the room" and ensuring that all voices and experience are taken into account as the process builds consensus through the different stages.

The PSP consists of five main stages (see Figure 6)

Preparation and Design: Prior to going into the visioning stage of the strategic planning process, careful thought and consideration need to be given to the intent of the process, who should be involved (and how their ideas can be incorporated into the process if they are not able to be physically present), and what background information or knowledge will help inform the decisions that will subsequently be taken. Examples here might include the current strengths/resources/assets and weaknesses of the group/organisation, an environmental scan or trends analysis to raise awareness of the external factors that need to be taken into account

Practical Vision: In this stage participants are invited to articulate what they want to see in place in 3-5 years as a result of their actions. What will their community/organisation look and feel like? What will demonstrate to a visitor the amount of progress that has been made? What will be different? The intent of this stage is to enable people to envision a practical level of change and progress in their situation, to give them a destination or a goal for the ensuing period and, by so doing, to inspire and encourage them to work towards it.

Example 4: Working with Sarajevo municipalities, Bosnia and Herzegovina

In the 1990s, working in 6 municipalities in Sarajevo with World Vision under funding from UNHCR's Open Cities program, the purpose was to attract fearful minorities back to the homes they had abandoned in enclaves now dominated by another ethnic group. The process used was:

1. Train municipal authorities in basic ToP (usually about 20 people).

2. Identify local respected community leaders and train them in basic ToP (usually about 20, with as much gender and ethnic diversity as possible given that few minorities remained).

3. Bring together both groups for Participatory Strategic Planning (PSP) for their community, with a focus question that raised the need to attract back the minorities by making the community safe for them to return.

4. In the action planning phase, try to get them focused on doable things, with small amounts of funding available from United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR).

5. Post strategic planning, hold meetings to actually develop the grant proposals.

The intent was not to surface grievances or revisit pain. Those of us using the ToP methods were not trained specifically in dealing with psychological trauma, and it might have been dangerous for us to engage in that aspect of the situation, but there were many other organizations on the ground working on the psycho-social aspects of post-conflict in the region, and most of our participants already had access to that kind of care if they wanted it. Susan's theory, based on her own experience, was that when people who think they hate each other work together for a common goal, they can pull themselves out of the morass of anger and pain.

This was not easy work. There was subtle sabotage from people who wanted the UNHCR money but did not want the refugees to return. At the outset there was lack of confidence in the methods by the community leaders, who felt it might be a trick of some kind. The municipal authorities participating were fearful of giving up power to the community. And then when we got to the strategic directions and the action planning, many wanted impossible things (e.g. get the huge, abandoned, communist-style factory working again so we'll all have jobs). But the fact was that people who distrusted each other and didn't even

want to sit at the same table with each other in the workshops couldn't help but get excited as the process unfolded. ToP just opens up possibility for people, and they can hardly keep themselves from engaging in building their world. (Susan Fertig-Dykes, personal communication).

Underlying Contradictions: Working within the context of the practical vision, the second stage enables people to identify the things that are blocking them from reaching where they want to go. This is where the concept of "contradictional thinking" (see section F below) is brought in to help participants work through the issues they identify to the point that a) it is clear what the issue really is and b) it is providing a clear pointer or "doorway" to what a solution might be. This lays the ground for the third stage.

Strategic Directions: Having clarified where they want to go, and what is stopping from getting there, the third stage of the process is to have people think about what they can do- what are the actions that they can take which will overcome the obstacles and move them towards their vision. Here the challenge is to think in terms of actions and strategies and to focus on what the participants themselves can do: it is their plan, they are not making it for someone else. Once actions have been identified then they can arranged to reveal the broader directions that those actions suggest, and these become the agreed strategic directions for the group.

Focused Implementation: The final stage concentrates on the first year of the plan. Actions and achievements that the group would like to have completed by the end of the first year are prioritised. In this way the PSP process can move the group through from visioning right down to the detail of who is going to do what next week, showing how the process is already going to be taken forward and implemented.

F. Contradictional Thinking

While the whole PSP process is relevant in a conflict situation when considering how to enable a group to move out of its current impasse together towards something more positive and desired (in terms of being, thinking and doing), it is perhaps the focus on "Underlying Contradictions" which provides people with a tool which can help a group in

conflict look deeply at the blocks they are facing and, through a process of analysis and realisation, begin to discern ways forward. This is the process ICA calls contradictional thinking.

Contradictions are real- not imagined or possible, but existing in the real world you are operating in. They may not, in and of themselves, be negative but there is an aspect of them which is causing them to block your progress towards your vision. There is nothing inherently negative about a rock, but if it is sitting in the middle of the road that you are driving along to the town you want to reach, it can become a contradiction. A second attribute of the contradictions is that they relate to your own vision. If the rock is sitting in the middle of a road that you are not going down, you are not affected by it. It is only when it is blocking the route to where you want to go that it assumes greater importance.

One of the "tricks" that a ToP facilitator uses during the Underlying Contradictions stage of the PSP is to ban the use of "lack of" or "no" in an effort to help participants think more deeply and to reflect the nature of contradictions more accurately. It encourages people to think more deeply about what is really blocking them and to move down the "Levels of Discernment" (see Figure 7 below):
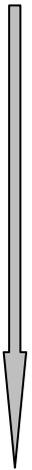
Simplistic

Substantial

My practical vision is to be able to sell my produce to keep up my local farming lifestyle.	
Irritants	It upsets me to see my produce rot when I fail to sell it
Blame	I blame the buyers who have no loyalty and have all switched to the supermarkets rather than buying from me. I also blame the supermarkets.
Lack of	Lack of a market for my produce.
Issue	Supermarkets have the market all locked up.
Block	Supermarket buyers are blocking me from selling my produce.
Obstacle	Local produce buying patterns put heavy demands on me.
Underlying obstacle	The big scale, regular delivery and low cost system of corporate producers is very easy for the supermarkets.
Contradiction	My dependence on supermarket culture contradicts my personal farm values.
Doorway to the future	The high quality of my produce and personal contacts are my future.

Figure 7: Levels of Discernment

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The avoidance of "lack of" also:

a) avoids people simply describing the status quo (our vision is to have freedom of movement, our contradiction is lack of freedom of movement) which fails to get at the root of the issue- it simply describes how things are now, rather than identifying what is preventing progress

b) It challenges people to think beyond symptoms to the deeper root issues that cause the symptoms to keep re-appearing- it is not the daily frustrations that are the real blocks, but the deeper strategies and forces at play

c) It lowers the danger of people thinking in terms of absent solutions (lack of training, lack of equipment, lack of money) and to concentrate instead on defining the issue. The thinking here is that a deeper and clearer understanding of the issue will give rise to a number of possible solutions, rather being fixated on the absence of one.

This is not an exhaustive list of ToP methods but they are indicative of some of the methods that can be used when working with a group in conflict, or even if they are not. The boxes give examples of how these and other methods have been used in very different situations with very different types of conflict, be it at the individual, group, organisational or societal level.

So what have we learnt?

As we consider the different tools and examples of ToP being used in different contexts, there are a number of insights we can draw which point both to the key contributions and limitations of ToP in conflict situations:

1.   The approach is action-orientated. ToP seeks to create an environment in which people can discuss their issues and come up with a way of moving forward. Even if some of the deeper issues remain, there is a sense that getting people to work together (and therefore to talk more with each other in the process) is a practical way of helping people move towards something they all share (see Example 4).

2.   There is an assumption behind this that people are ready, or can be got to a point, where they are ready to use the word "we" when sitting beside other conflict parties.

In cases where this is not the case, the process is unlikely to succeed unless there has been careful preparation beforehand (see Example 5).

Example 5: Working with Organisations, Malaysia

LENS International, Malaysia, has had several clients where conflict has emerged at the board level with directors not in agreement with each other in one case, and in another case, with the chairman and president not speaking to one another. In each of these cases the companies wanted us to facilitate a ToP strategic planning process with the board and senior management.

Upon learning about the conflict at the highest levels, we knew some work needed to be done prior to the planning sessions. Our decision was to request interviews with each member of these board-level groups in advance of the planning sessions. The interviews were carried out individually and notes taken and collated under themes (no names). Meetings were then scheduled with the boards and notes presented followed by a Focused Conversation ending with next steps for a successful strategic planning. The resulting meetings evolved quite differently with these two clients - in one there were tears with the president and chairman gradually talking to each other and shaking hands; in the other quite a lot of heated discussion emerged among the various members, but they also came to an understanding that they were all sharing the same vision and that in the planning, they would work out a common strategy where they knew there would be different perspectives.

To make a long story short both of the strategic planning sessions went very well subsequent to the interviews and board meetings. Additional managers attended besides the ones we interviewed and met with previously. (Ann Epps, personal communication)

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3.   ToP can be used not only in situations where there are two parties are involved, but also where conflicts are multi-party, multi-dimensional and systemic.

4.   Often ToP practitioners use a vision-led approach (based on the thinking behind the PSP method)- working with people to enable them to imagine what their future could look like, before going onto analyse the blocks and obstacles that prevent them from achieving that vision. This contrasts with other more problem-led approaches.

5.   The emphasis in ToP is on process rather than content. In other words, the focus is on enabling people to come up with their own ideas and solutions, based on their own wisdom and understanding of the situation. While this may lead to greater acceptance of ICA as an intervening agency (see Example 6) this approach may be challenged in situations where the "wisdom of the group" has been so undermined and eroded by years (even generations) of fraught existence and hatred of "the other" that the role of the facilitator has to go beyond asking questions to providing much more substantive insight and guidance both to support and help the group in their discussions and decision-making.

Example 6: Building Civil Society in Far Western Region of Nepal

ICA Nepal has been launching a project entitled "Building Civil Society through Facilitative Planning, Conflict Resolution and Peace Building Activities in three districts of Far Western region of Nepal". It has been implemented in nine village development committees of Dadeldhura, Doti and Baitadi districts. The project includes activities on training/facilitation, literacy, awareness raising, construction of environmentally sound and low cost toilets, sustainable agriculture, micro credit and human rights.

ICA carried out massive training to government staff during the conflict. The participants were trained on dealing conflict by applying facilitative approaches. They were trained on Group Facilitation Methods (GFM) and PSP so that they could tackle conflicting issues at local level. In addition, people were trained to develop conflict-sensitive plans: By using PSP, local people in remote areas were trained on developing conflict sensitive plans so that they could cope up with the threat of conflicts.

ICA Nepal involved both the conflicting parties at local level to sort out the causes and consequences of conflicts. In some cases, we invited both the parties to resolve the conflicts. Basic participatory tools such as GFM and PSP were used to handle the situation.

As we applied participatory tools and techniques in the community development work, we were never threatened by any parties. In some cases, all the NGOs were kicked out from the village as the Maoists thought they were increasing dependency at the local level, ICA in

Nepal was always welcomed even by such groups as we were using facilitative tools giving due respect and credit to all the people of the community. (Tatwa Timsina, personal communication)

6. Although ToP may be defined as a set of tools or methods, it is more than that. The combination of many years of research and experiential learning means that ToP is more of an approach, informed by and reflecting a set of values and practices that not only means careful and relevant adaptation of methods, but pays attention to all the different factors that need to be considered if a group are to feel able to participate meaningfully, including caring for the space they are in. It is this holistic approach to participation (reflected by the Rational and Experiential Aims) which helps ToP to succeed (see Example 7).

Example 7: Leadership Training in Peru

ICA Peru offers a 3-week Leadership Formation program every month to a group of 30 leaders from a small group of adjacent communities. We had a wonderful example of the effectiveness of this program in July 2010 with a group from Catahuasi District in the central sierra of Peru. This District had a long history of often violent conflict and the mayor was a dictatorial-type who would work with no one. In our program were three candidates for mayor to unseat this guy in the October elections. The three came into our program aggressively attacking each other which continued for much of the first week, which was a pretty tense time for everyone. But in the second week they began to talk to each other, and by the third week they were planning together. After our program they got together with many community members and decided that one of the three would be supported by all, and Abram was elected and is now the mayor. The demeanor has changed remarkably in the community and the people now know that they can really be in charge of their community. (Ken Hamje, personal communication)

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7. Using ToP enables facilitators and practitioners to bring together in one process aspects of conflict prevention, resolution and transformation, peacebuilding and community development. All too often it seems that the different areas are seen as separate disciplines, each with their own proponents and methodologies. ToP cuts through this by its stance of "life is as it is" and its focus on process, taking individuals,

groups and communities on a journey and able to support them all along the way (see Examples 8 and 9)

Example 8: Participatory Project Prioritization, Afghanistan

In 2010 ToP practitioner Alisa Oyler worked with the International Non-Government Organisation Mercy Corps to develop a standard community mobilization methodology as part of the Community Development Program in Balkh Province, Afghanistan. This was largely intended to mitigate possible conflict in communities going through a project selection process. In addition to some other elements, the mobilization included a Participatory Project Prioritization Process (P4M) Meeting format that blends a little ToP (a variation of a vision workshop using pictures instead of words) with some Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) methods. As a participant, Haji Safar from Kaldar district said "*asking local people for identifying their problems, is a really impressive approach to motivate and empower us to stand on our feet and to really contribute to stabilization and sustain local resources*". (Alisa Oyler, personal communication)

Example 7: Using ToP in Peacebuilding

In Nairobi, Kenya in 2009 and as part of a Peace Exchange organised by Peace Direct (www.peacedirect.org) that brought together peacebuilders from across Africa and Asia, Rosemary Cairns used the Consensus Workshop method to address the question– how do you know that your community is becoming more peaceful?

The answers revealed that local peacebuilders tend to see the answers in human terms – in how people relate to each other, work together, and solve problems. For them, demobilizing their communities is as much about making friends of their "enemies" and of "spoilers" and teaching people to live together peacefully as it is about taking guns away from people.

Such a perspective means that the indicators they identify are more subtle ones – about how people relate to each other, and about how that affects individual security within a community or a region. In Nairobi, they named such indicators as "women singing songs of peace rather than war at public events", "people are eating together", "people not being afraid to walk at night in their community", "trade routes across borders reopening", "the

media telling stories about everyday life instead of war", and "the price of cement drops". The bulk of these indicators fell into two groups – social relationships being enhanced, and personal security increasing. Institutional and economic development are less relevant to their work at the community level in at least the initial stages.

For the peacebuilders, too, ToP seemed to be a revelation. Here were all these ideas, which came out of their own experience and knowledge, neatly organized and grouped in a way that gave them a picture of their work that they had not been used to seeing. It produced some new insights. One external observer pointed out that while much international peacebuilding focused on institutional restructuring and economic development, local peacebuilders were focused on building trust among people and rebuilding relationships that had been damaged by conflict.

Even more important than the coherent picture of their work which emerged, however, was the knowledge that these indicators came from their own experience and expertise as people who are building peace in communities that have been damaged by war in Africa and Asia. These were "their" indicators – not indicators developed by someone else who was not familiar with their communities and people. And this was an empowering experience for local NGOs who were used to working with indicators that had been developed by people elsewhere, often quite distant from their community. Some had never been involved in evaluation of their projects, seeing it as something done by external experts rather than by local people. (Rosemary Cairns- this is an extract of an article that first appeared in the ICA:UK Newsletter, September 2010)

What is the future for ToP being used in conflict?

I see two main directions here:

1. ToP is already used in conflict. Compartmentalisation of disciplines and thinking (including even what "lens" you choose to look at societal dynamics through) has led to different methods (not just ToP) being categorised or "silo-ed". To date ToP has been put under the community or organisational development banner. This does justice neither to the complexity and inter-connectedness of the issues being addressed, nor to the breadth and depth of what ToP can contribute to groups in conflict. So one direction is to work to break down some of these false differentiations and raise the profile of ToP as a methodology

which has something to offer those focusing on conflict, and to encourage greater cross-fertilisation of all approaches and methods.

2. There is now a whole range of approaches and methods which have been tried and tested in conflict. To my way of thinking, there is real value in considering how the different methods and approaches can be combined (even integrated) to provide the most powerful approach that we can to work with people who are suffering from being in a conflict and who want to move on. This is very much the approach taken by the Kumi project[1] which started in Israel and Palestine, but which is now beginning to explore how the method and approach developed can be applied in other conflicts and other places. Kumi brought together ToP practitioners and experts in identity based conflict and in conflict analysis. Out of this has emerged a process which is arguably more powerful than any of our approaches could have delivered on their own, but which at the same time, reflects the values and principles of all of them. Such combination and integration of ToP with other methods is already happening in less conflicted scenarios but with equal effect.

Acknowledgements

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[1] See www.ica-uk.org.uk/research for further details on the Kumi project

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These examples and others demonstrating and recording the use of ToP in conflict and in many other situations can be found at http://top-facilitators.com/serendipity and/or http://site.top-facilitators.com