



International Institute
for Nonviolent Action

COMMUNITY FACILITATION

FOR NONVIOLENT ECOSOCIAL TRANSITIONS

F-NET

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SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF NONVIOLENCE AS A SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION PROCESS

"Whatever my individual desires were to be free, I was not alone. There were many others who felt the same way." Rosa Parks

Over the past century, there has been much debate about nonviolence and how to create a common theoretical framework. Nonviolence as a philosophy and framework which regulates our character, the way we think and act appears as an alternative to violent ways of facing conflict. Conflict is part of our nature as groups and communities. From the point of view of communities and groups and through the collective work in which we set nonviolent facilitation, we understand that in a reality socially built by interdependent humans (both among each other and within a context) where knowledge is based on practice and is generated and developed through dialogue, nonviolence cannot be understood without combining these elements: social construction, interdependence, practice and dialogue. In this chapter, we present nonviolence as a social construction and a process of social transformation. As we will see during this handbook, the Nonviolent Community Facilitation pays special attention to group and community processes. Therefore, this first chapter provides us with some ideas of how to frame our work as facilitators, that are at the same time tools to develop our facilitation work (means) and guiding principles we should follow and reach (aims). This community work is not easy and will face different contradictions, especially when trying to work in nonviolent ways in violent contexts and we will see how it is precisely those features of nonviolence as social construction and transformation process which allow us to move forward in these contradictions.

Building Coherence; from our principles to our practices Nonviolence as a way of facing conflict.

*"The optimist believes in others and the pessimist only believes in himself"
G.K. Chesterton*

We understand success in facing conflict as satisfying the needs of all parties involved in a long-lasting way. All parties involved must therefore

be involved and confront the causes of conflict in order for the process to be successful. If we understand conflict as multidimensional, we may infer that simultaneously solving all dimensions of a conflict (especially in complex and global conflict) is unrealistic and we must see it as a transforming process which generates changes (partial success) as conflict is gradually solved.

The theory and practice of nonviolence that took place during the decolonization of India, with Gandhi as its most visible figure (satyagraha) presents nonviolence as a type of action which aims to tackle conflict in all its dimensions and transform it into consensus¹. Final consensus in form of a common, shared vision of "truth" (satya) would be the utopian goal. The means we choose in order to face conflict will determine which goals will be accomplished. This more systematic vision, with its clear interdependence between means and goals, is theoretically the best way in which to counter violence seen as a multidimensional phenomenon (structural, cultural and direct). Gandhi was one of the forefathers in theorizing in this field and he saw nonviolence as a philosophy of life whose legitimacy was rooted in its high moral principles, but many subsequent movements have focused more on practice (though not dismissing the value of those principles) and trying to avoid the contradictions that stem from confronting conflict in a nonviolent way while trying to reach consensus. These practices have not been homogeneous and, as a consequence we find terms which have tried to define them such as pacifism, nonviolence, civil resistance, popular resistance, etc... whose meaning varies depending on the author or the trend that uses them where we can find the same meaning under different terms or the same term being used with different meanings. Bearing in mind the systematic viewpoint, we shall study where these terms appear and what some of their contradictions are. As a starting point, we will use Vinthagen's² simple scheme

Nonviolence = (without violence + against violence)* with others.

By using this equation, we draw limits on what we understand as nonviolence. Firstly, it leaves out any conception of nonviolence as something passive as it includes pro activity in its definition and it also seems far from an individualistic understanding of nonviolence. A hermit who lives outside

1. Naess, Arne (1974): *Gandhi and Group Conflict*. Universitetsforlaget. Oslo. Naess synthesizes Gandhi's philosophy of Nonviolence in a series of hypothesis and norms.

2. Vinthagen, S. (2015): *A theory of Nonviolent Action. How Civil Resistance works*. Zed books. London. Vinthagen only speaks of without and against violence. Although, in his analysis community and collective vision are merely supportive and thus not stated, we deem these ideas worthy of mention in this scheme.

society and leads a nonviolent life seems excluded from this definition even though the exact meaning of this definition still depends on what we understand as violence and delimitations set by the idea of others.

In order to mark out what we refer to as violence, we will use Galtung's definition: "Violence exists when human beings are being influenced in such a way that current fulfilment of their physical and mental abilities is below potential development".

Violence, therefore, would be what causes a difference between potential development and current development, the difference between what could be and what is and what prevents reducing that difference. Galtung then differentiates between direct violence carried out by an intentional actor, which would be visible violence, and structural violence, which by definition is much closer to social injustice and the structures that uphold that injustice. The latter would be a more invisible type of violence. Most direct violent responses have their match in structural violence and vice versa. Galtung also introduces cultural violence which is interdependent of structural and direct violence such as the cultural aspects of society that legitimise both kinds of violence (and feeds from them). Although this definition already limits what "without violence" and "against violence" are, those concepts would still be open to discussion, mainly depending on their "cultural dimension". What in some contexts and groups may be considered "without violence and against violence" may not be considered nonviolence by other groups. Many everyday acts in Spain could not be categorized as nonviolent in this equation (they would fit in "without violence" but not in "against violence") but in Palestine, the motto "to exist is to resist" has become widespread and everyday existence has, in many cases, become the proactive way of fighting against violence. And vice versa, an action against private property would never comply to Gandhi's norm as synthesised by Naess while sabotage is one of the nonviolent techniques that Gene Sharp³ includes in his 198 ways of nonviolent action (this kind of action would fit in "against violence" but according to Naess, it would not fit in "without violence"). We do not intend to fall into absolute relativism (which is why we present a theoretical framework for violence as reference and a simple equation of nonviolence). We present the problem between that absolute truth, that utopia we desire to reach, and truth as a constructed body and we present nonviolence as a process of social construction, which varies from a common minimum to a desirable maximum. The common minimum

3. Gene Sharp represents pragmatic nonviolence which emphasizes techniques/tactics and bases its legitimacy on success. It is an instrumental vision of nonviolence. SHARP, G. (1973). *The Methods of Nonviolent Action - part two of: The Politics of Nonviolent Action*. Boston, MA: Porter Sargent:

and the desirable maximum depend on the size of the community (from a small group to humankind understood as community) and the shared values among that community. That common minimum goes from basic, globally shared principles⁴ such as murder being the maximum expression of violence (common minimum ideas on which most people agree) to other questions where those minimums might be more and easier to reach (e.g. when the with others of our definitions is a small group or community, there may be more ideas or principles and less people who share them). Maximums would take us to maximum shared principles and maximum number of people who share them (Gandhi's utopia where the others is humankind). This conceptualization of nonviolence from a more sociological point of view and not so much from the viewpoint of principles (what Vinthagen would call social construction of nonviolence⁵) presents nonviolence as the most natural way of tackling these questions about principles and practices, building the coherence among them in dialogue with others, with our community and with other communities. As we will see in the chapter about conflicts, building with others following the encounter logic.

The contradiction in relation to the other. Changing with

"Do not walk in front of me, I may not follow you. Do not walk behind me, I may not guide you. Walk with me and be my friend" Albert Camus

The way we understand reality affects how we want to transform it and who we want to transform it with. Throughout this chapter we present the theory, in line with social psychology, where interaction with others and their context determines what reality is ⁶. In the theory of social construction of reality, reality is the knowledge subjects (people) have of a series of external phenomenon that are not linked to those subjects (social construction of reality). If, in order to analyse how knowledge is produced, we use Freire's⁷ dichotomy of the banker-liberator, we would go from concepts where knowledge is accumulated by a few and they, in turn, transmit that knowledge to the rest in a unidirectional manner, to more

4. García, Félix (2008): *Ensayo sobre la bondad humana*. Biblioteca nueva. Madrid. The author establishes certain principles and values that are universal (they have been adopted by all cultures at all times) and then reflects on the different dimensions of human good.

5. Vinthagen reconceptualises nonviolence using social sciences, presenting it as a social construction and establishing correspondence between satyagraha and Habermas' theory of communicative action.

6. Berger, Peter L.; Luckmann, Thomas (1986): *La construcción social de la realidad*. Amorrortu. Buenos Aires.

7. Freire, Paulo (1975): *Pedagogía del Oprimido*. Siglo XXI. Madrid. Freire, Paulo (2005): *Pedagogía de la esperanza*. Siglo XXI. Mexico.

dialogical approaches to learning, where knowledge is not the property of a few but is produced through dialogue with others⁸.

Our position determines our vision of the other, their role in defining our reality and how we value that reality in order to transform it. From a banking perspective, not all subjects involved in defining reality are on the same level and therefore, do not have the same capability in transforming things. There are those who “receive” knowledge and thus establish a more passive relation with reality which will not change or will be changed by others and there are others who make decisions, agreements and establish what things are like and who, in terms of change, know what and how things must be changed. We will call this “Changing for”. From a dialogical point of view where reality is a social construction produced by people meeting and where “I” and “the others” are the protagonists, in order to change reality one must be part of it and carry out transformation with others. We will call this attitude “Changing with”.

Type of change	Change for	Change with
Attitudes	We know the change needed, we can work to make reality better for others	If we want to change reality, we need to be part of it, we need to be part of the change we want. We do it with others

For any kind of transformation to last, it must be assumed by the subjects affected by that transformation and the best way to do this is by them being part of the change, being protagonists of transformation. This Changing with (others) is precisely what the equation Nonviolence = (Without violence + against violence)* with others refers to. It is the kind of change which gives sense to nonviolence as a social construction and lets us tackle conflict from the logic of encounter geared towards consensus.

This is simple from a theoretical point of view but in practice: How do we relate to others? From a multidimensional viewpoint on conflict, drawing borders on others is not a simple task. We could differentiate between akin and different, alien and contrary; those who are similar in certain dimensions of conflict may be different or even contrary in other dimensions. Social movements which fight oppression very often take up

8. Habermas, J. (1987). *Teoría de la acción comunicativa*. Tomos I y II Madrid: Taurus.
 Aubert, A., Flecha, A., García, C., Flecha, R., y Racionero, S. (2008). *Aprendizaje dialógico en la sociedad de la información*. Barcelona: Hipatia Editorial.
 Wenger, Etienne (2001): *Comunidades de práctica: aprendizaje, significado e identidad*. Paidós Ibérica. Barcelona.
 Freire, Paulo (2005): *Pedagogía de la esperanza*. Siglo XXI. Mexico.

the changing with stance on paper but their internal organisation, the way they interact with reality is often closer to changing if they see others as different or alien. These organisations also implement changing against or despite of when dealing with contraries.

If a movement theoretically positions itself in changing with but then puts changing for in practice due to not knowing how to really build with others or to lack of resources, they must continue improving their skills and increasing resources. It is a question of overcoming the dichotomy between principles and practice. Understanding nonviolence as a social construction, as a process, will allow us to face that dichotomy without drowning in the principles that should guide our practice.

The difficulty and the biggest criticism for logics of encounter (and nonviolence) in the way it tackles conflict is; what happens when the others are contrary and show no willingness to dialogue? What happens when we do not acknowledge others or we do not think their positions are acceptable? Nonviolence acknowledges the other believing that any future transformation must include them. Nonviolent management of conflict does not aim at transformation through making one of the parties disappear (annihilation). All parties must, therefore, continue existing once conflict has been overcome. The first way to tackle this situation is to try to depersonalise contrary positions by referring to fight against oppression instead of oppressors, somehow sympathising with those who exercise oppression as victims of an oppression-generating system. In practice, this is not a simple task although it must stand an orientating principle. The second way is acknowledging that in order to reach an adequate situation for dialogue and meeting of equals, we must balance power positions between the parties in conflict. This will necessarily imply confrontation where the oppressed (who suffer violence) must undermine the power of the oppressors (who exercise violence). This is the most frequent situation and this confrontation, which aims at encounter, often results in negotiation. It is in this perspective of confrontation where the more pragmatic visions of nonviolence have made their largest contributions by presenting themselves as an alternative to violence. Nonviolence appears as an efficient tool in undermining the oppressor's power by withdrawing people's support. The power of people is considered an engine of transformation. The pragmatic school of thought has developed nonviolence as a compilation of techniques and tactics that follow similar logics to those of the military in achieving goals. Satyagraha sees this confrontation as a nonviolent escalation through which a growing number of people and the combination of nonviolent

methods succeed in reaching the desired state of transformation. This interjection to the common people, the inclusive modes of action that can be assumed by a wide variety of social profiles, the educational and communicative traits of many of its practices, the solidarity they raise, the difficulty in criminalizing them... have allowed the democratisation of social movements of transformation facilitating that changing with, at least between different and alien.

Power-with instead of power-over

"Power and violence are opposites; where the one rules absolutely, the other is absent. Violence appears where power is in jeopardy, but left to its own course it ends in power's disappearance" Hanna Arendt

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has." Margaret Mead

By understanding the democratising character of nonviolence, as both an inward and outward process, we can approach the idea of power in confrontation between contraries and differentiate it from power in logics of domination. The idea of power refers both to the capability to do things and to the relation of asymmetrical influence that exists between various actors, the capability of getting others to do things. Both concepts co-exist and it is essential to bear them both in mind. The idea of power over⁹ others (making others do) usually goes from top to bottom, whilst the idea of being able to do, especially if understood as the power to do with others and not for others, goes from bottom to top. Nonviolent movements build power from power with others; they understand that power resides in the collective, in people and their capability to interact. From the point of view of internal organisation, power is not something that must be comparatively measured: your power v mine, I have more power than... It must be understood as what stems from the base and adds up; your power + my power = the power of change.

This same democratising principle of nonviolence, from changing from inwards, is what has allowed the Palestine nonviolent resistance movement to tackle the issue of building their without violence and against violence. In Palestine, the term "nonviolence" is not so widespread because its

9. Luther King describes power as the ability to reach the goal. The capability that can be created if our mutual interests in our corresponding resources can be combined to reach a common goal. If interest in our resources is uneven, this will generate a relation of uneven influence due to unequal interest (power over).

origin lies in the English translation of the word *ahimsa* and its divulgation by Gandhi. As opposed to armed resistance, they have constructed what they call Popular Resistance (Mukawa shabee) where the word “popular” bears the idea of changing with, the idea that everybody has the power to take part in the resistance. This does not occur in armed resistance where the monopoly of weapons by a small group prevents popular participation. They deem armed action as less participatory than nonviolent action. Their way of building their own “without violence” and “against violence” is, therefore, something like “popular against violence”.

Changing today or changing tomorrow. Means and ends, principles and practice.

“When you do not live as you think, you end up thinking about how you live” Gabriel Marcel

We have discussed that resistance to oppression is a characteristic of nonviolence but from a multidimensional viewpoint on conflict in which we achieve partial goals, this resistance is not enough to transform (we cannot wait until we “win” before we “transform”). Social movements which have managed to incorporate alternative ideas have been more successful.

Besides the public goals defined in their demands, social movements and protest campaigns activate new social relations which through proliferation and recognition entail deep cultural and political transformation. The main contributions of these collective dynamics (from and for changing with) are their capability in becoming part of everyday life, reducing the feeling of cost or effort when getting involved, generating knowledge that connects local and global dynamics, re-establishing social links with the affected groups, building skills and capabilities in order to face new challenges, establishing long-term community responsibility or reducing rejection towards the issues at hand.

Nonviolence cannot be understood as nonviolent resistance alone. It is the sum of resistance and construction.

Nonviolence = non-violent resistance + non-violent construction¹⁰

Social movements must have a double agenda, reconciling great goals

10. Vinthagen adds this equation to the previous scheme of “without violence and against violence” in his representation of nonviolence as social construction.

and the pursuit of their goals with the construction of different realities (nonviolent) that anticipate the change they want to see in the world to the extent of their capabilities. These alternative practices would be collective strategies that solve needs, allow access to goods and services or develop other nonviolent lifestyles. Although these experiences may be partial and imperfect, they become examples. They seduce and allow the population to get involved in changing processes so they simultaneously draw up the lifestyle they wish to reach and denounce dominant conventions.

Raise awareness to change reality or change reality to raise awareness

“Until you dig a hole, you plant a tree, you water it and make it survive, you haven’t done a thing. You are just talking.” Wanghari Muta Maathai

We must not consider simultaneous construction and resistance only as coherent principles and practice, means and ends. From a pragmatic point of view, it accelerates and consolidates transformation processes and increases the movement’s legitimacy. Many people will approach movements not attracted by their principles but by their practice and this practice will be the stepping stone from which these people will change and share the principles of these movements. Historically, it was thought that we normally went through an awareness-raising process which made us change our values and beliefs and finally altered our behaviour. Although this idea is partly true, it is too rational and must bear in mind contributions of environmental psychology which states that we often change our practice before rationalising them. Many traits of our behaviour are not the result of conscious and intentional decisions. They respond to changes in habits and procedures which become persistent in our personality and the way we see the world.

Although it may seem counter-intuitive, alternative practice raises awareness towards change just as much as awareness campaigns or educational processes. This “environmental” logic is present in several of the most powerful transformation movements of our time (MST, Zapatistas or PAH in Spain) and is absent in most western social movements. These movements are characterized by their resistant gene, their opposition more than by their constructive actions (creating alternative). From the point of view of social understanding of nonviolence that each social movement in the same context is a small community that practices nonviolence, it would not be necessary for all of them to develop their resistance and construction side equally. In order to transform reality, it would be sufficient if there

was to be a balance between resistance and construction when seen as a whole. This balance should exist in an interconnected way (the same way it exists when within the same group). They could not be isolated communities of practice. Their interdependence would create a community of communities of nonviolent practice (in a process of maximization of common minimums) or a web of communities of nonviolent practice (where, for example, the connectors could be subjects who belong to two communities simultaneously. One could be more resistant and the other more constructive and the subject could connect both).

Summary

It is in each of these communities, in their specific contexts and struggles where debate should take place and where they should build their own repertoires of action based on their principles and values. Their actions will speak for them; they will define what type of transformation they have chosen. Based on those common minimums which are practically universal (transversal to almost all communities)¹¹ they will have to deal with the contradictions that will appear between their *without violence* and their *against violence*, between proposing and resisting, between changing with and changing for (or against), between means and ends, principles and practice. Understanding these contradictions as a natural part of the struggle to transform society into fairer scenarios is precisely what we consider to be the fundamental value of nonviolence as social construction. This will establish dialogues between these dichotomies: between people in our communities and between different communities that make up the constellation of interconnected struggles is characteristic of nonviolence. Far from being debilitated by these contradictions, they are the roots from which nonviolence is built and they make nonviolence the best way to experience conflict with a logic aimed at encounter. This dialogue that is born from contradictions is a land of opportunity for transformation. It is not a naive vision of dialogue. Nonviolence is born and built around the idea of resistance, of confrontation but this resistance and confrontation do not strive -in means or ends- to eliminate the opposition. It thrives on the moral and pragmatic legitimacy of that choice. Neither is nonviolence a "partial" vision of dialogue where there are only two interlocutors. It understands "dialogue" in a multidimensional way, where me, others and the world are interconnected. Nonviolence puts into practice the future it imagines for tomorrow and for today. We could, therefore, define nonviolence as the combination of actions aimed to encounter ?? allow dialectical interaction in a situation of conflict. It is in this type of interaction where transformation (from today but focusing on tomorrow) takes place because today is the future.

11. We return to the idea of common minimums that we described when defining nonviolence as without violence + against violence. E.g. Killing is violent (universal to all communities and eras). We do not discuss whether it is legitimate or not.

UNDERSTANDING THE GROUP AND THE COMMUNITY

A group is a number of people with a common goal (this goal can be more or less clear, more or less explicit). The way the group tries to reach its goals is what we call "process". Groups also have a certain degree of structure, structures are fundamental to make the group more democratic and efficient. However, they have to have the flexibility of a collective tool, not the corset. The idea would be that groups move under the same premise of "neither the tyranny of the lack of structures, nor their excess".

The main task of a facilitator is "helping to increase the efficiency of the group improving the process and the structure" (Roger Schwarz, in "The skilled Facilitator"; but we will improve this definition adding two important aspects: a) what do we talk about when we mean "efficiency" and what are the other pillars for group effectiveness and efficiency.

What is an efficient group? Intelligent Groups

From our understanding of Nonviolence as a social construction, where the role of people transforming their own realities is crucial, and the most coherent way to deal with those transformation processes is to start acting as groups (internally) as we will like things to be in the future. These leads us to specific types of organizations and groups, whose maximum efficiency and effectiveness would be reached when they manage to work as Intelligent Groups.

On the contrary of what can be understood as an intelligent group it is the not one formed by intelligent people, since there are groups constituted by intelligent people that can be quite silly as a group.

When we discuss for all or for nothing, when it is difficult to agree on anything, when we don't feel comfortable in the group... before thinking about the lack of commitment of the people, their lack of work, or their bad intentions, we should ask ourselves: is my group not working in an intelligent way?

The group is something different to the people, although it is constituted by them.

The intelligent group is the one that manages to be more than the addition of the individuals that are part of it. Sometimes there are groups that are a real subtraction of the abilities of those that constitute it.

We can consider that a group is intelligent when it:

- Collectively accomplishes its objectives The group integrates the wellbeing of individuals with the one of the group. People understand and feel the pleasure of working collectively.
- The group creates collective intelligence from its components intelligence. It uses the advantages of group thinking and overcomes individual limits.
- The group takes advantage of the diversity of its components: abilities, brains, sensitivities, affections... instead of considering it a problem. It does not make difference an opposition and conflicts are thought about to optimize propositions and structure.
- The group's reason to exist isn't imposed, figurative or non-existent, it is due to the result of a real collective construction.
- The group has a structure that is directed towards task and sense, decided upon and designed by the same group. It tends to build a horizontal structure in which individuals can participate, decide, work and learn.
- The group puts forward tools, resources, and propositions that facilitate cooperative and multiplying interaction instead of work systems that overlap, contradict, or divide individual efforts.
- No group is completely silly or intelligent.

It is complex for a group to work in an intelligent way. It is, an evolving system, affected by a multiplicity of factors, it does not occur just by improving the structure or the process, we need to think also on the people and the objectives.

Pillars of group effectiveness: Objectives, People, Process

The three pillars are interdependent and a facilitator needs to know all of them and all what is related to each of the three to help to increase the efficiency of the group. Groups are not sustained or do not work well just by “good will”. There is a need to attend to the different dimensions of the groups.

Objectives

Objectives tend to be the most visible part of the group. The facilitator helps the group to build and design all together the common vision and the mission that will bring that vision into practice: The vision is the “future” and the main idea that we all share; The mission is the practical way or the path we choose to reach it, and then we can have proposals as the last level of concretion, as the way the group looks how to solve its needs. The group will have different levels of objectives in each of these categories.

The process

Every idea or goal needs a process to become true. The group needs to pay attention to the process. Groups might not work not because of the people, or due to unclear objectives, but because of bad processes. Process attends to:

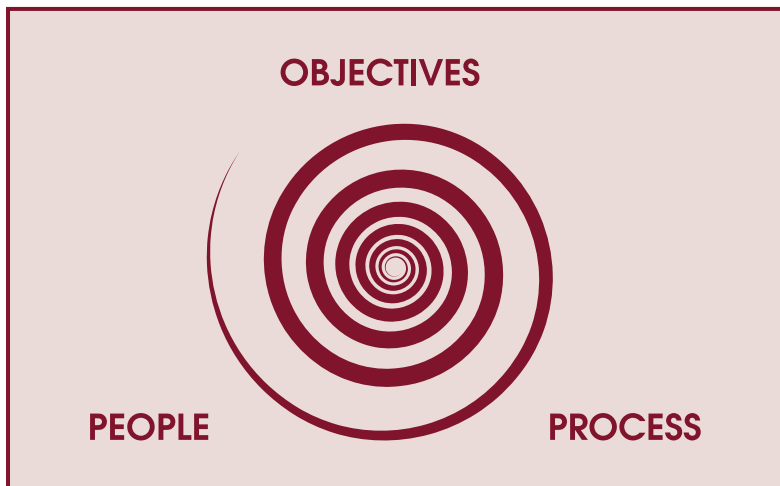
- The design and management of the tasks
- The communication between members and the group (related to the interactions between the members of the group)
- The decision-making
- The evaluation and follow-up
- The management of emotions and conflicts

The facilitation will establish a methodology that will take care of the participation, transparency and shared power (power with, especially in the decision making). One of the key moments in any group process are meetings, and we will pay special attention in this manual of how to deal with them.

People

Human beings and groups are complex. One person will probably belong to more than one community or group, and their life experience in all those groups will affect each other, sometimes in a positive way, and sometimes in not such a positive way. The different roles each person has, or the different persons that share the same role affect the life. The different levels of relationships (one with each other, one or the other with him or herself, one or the other with the group generated among all) are a constant source of activity in a group. Disregarding them, ignoring them or forcing them, can damage everything: people, process and objectives. Of the three vertex of our triangle, this is the one that involves more complexity. Experience in groups causes injuries to many of its members. From facilitation we aim to help groups to meet all needs, individual differences and listen to all voices. The care of people inspires us to seek the balance between personal and group spaces, identifying and respecting the personal boundaries of individuals. A deeply valuable tool is the way we communicate. We defend nonviolent communication based on empathy (how we listen) and assertiveness (how we express ourselves for the transformation of conflicts).

In this manual we will try to deal with some of the most important aspects related to these three pillars: **Personal needs or Motivations, Roles and leadership, Interactions, Conflicts, Decisions and Meetings.**



Levels in which the group is expressed:

The visible and the invisible

When we work with a group as facilitators, we know that the group is not just its visible face or what we call its "consensus reality" but it exists and is expressed also in the invisible level or the "non consensus reality":

Consensus reality:

It is the external and visible structure of every group. It is the group's primary identity, one that the group recognises itself and shows it to the outside. It has a formal aspect, visible in the tasks or activities that the group performs to achieve its objectives; visible in statutes, regulations, codes of conduct, etc., that the group is given to regulate itself; and visible in the space in which the group operates, in the elements present in that space and in the way they are distributed and work together. It also has an informal aspect, which manifests itself in the day-to-day, in the labor environment that is created, in the values and attitudes that accompany the admissible behaviors as well as the acceptable conversational contents and opinions.

Non consensus reality:

This is another level of reality underlying the previous one. The dream metaphor is used because it is a less conscious, more invisible dimension. It is inhabited with feelings and emotions, fears and expectations, and different forces of attraction and repulsion that characterise the dynamic field take action here. The group as such is not aware of many of the elements present in the secondary reality, nor is it aware of the pressure it exerts to keep repressed or denied some of them.

Key group areas to create community

If we identified three pillars for the group effectiveness, we can also identify four different dimensions or spaces that should be present in a group in order to improve the functioning of the group. These are the spaces where the three pillars and all its aspects happen: Space where the mind prevail (from a productive logic), space to share and celebrate, space to create and imagine, and the emotional space. It is quite common to find groups giving visible relevance only to one or two of the four spaces when designing their structures (usually the productive and sometimes the creation or the celebration), and keeping the other spaces under the invisible zone (not dealing with them in an open or structured way). Usually it happens more with the emotional space, especially with groups very oriented to the task. But it can be the other way around: For example in groups that after a while are still together just because they are friends, and forget the task, the objectives. As Facilitators we need to have the four spaces in mind, and help to balance the used of all of them.

<p>The assembly / meeting</p> <p>It is the space for decision-making. The mind, the reason prevails. In our culture, which values the mental aspect, this is the only space that has achieved the necessary recognition that allows it to be present in all groups. It privileges a way of being (intellectual, good use of the word, etc.) to the detriment of other human qualities.</p>	<p>Cohesion space</p> <p>It is the space where we share from a non-productive logic and we relate from different places to the daily work. Place for celebration and recognition of the collective successes.</p>
<p>Inquiry, creative space</p>	<p>The forum</p> <p>or space for the emotional management.</p>
<p>It is the space in which we collectively generate ideas, extract collective wisdom.</p>	<p>It emphasizes the emotional expression and the discovery of the forces that act through our unconscious acts.</p>

Needs and personal motivations

People, as human beings have several needs that need to be satisfied. As social beings groups are a basic place to solve them. According to Max Neef classification of fundamental needs participation is already one of them (subsistence, protection, affection, understanding, participation, leisure, creation, identity, freedom), and often the motivation to participate in groups is guided by trying to solve also the other needs. Through participating in groups people will probably try to solve some others. The group and its participants' wellbeing depend on the way in which motivations to participate are resolved and on how these are made compatible or incompatible with the rest of the group and with its aims.

There are motivations that are perfectly visible and others that remain hidden or are even denied.

Knowledge on the way in which people's motivations work in groups enables their satisfaction individually and collectively. The collective's intelligence lies in knowing them and incorporating them in the group's life, not hiding them or denying their existence.

Group motivations can be grouped in several ways. We will take Max Neef classification of Needs adding some specific motivations identified by the authors of Intelligent Groups:

	Position	Some ideas for its management
Social Significance	Humans are social beings and every human being wants to be significant, socially exist, although sometimes in a negative way at the expense of the group's aims, through interruptions, taking over conceited attitudes, etc.	It is not exclusive; it does not have to be at the expense of others. The intelligent group has to solve the tension between social significance and task. Sometimes this needs of rotation, silence, or discretion
Power	Stems from the need to control what surrounds us. Power as influence on others is a more complex degree of control of reality. This can be unidirectional and derived from the structure (hierarchical structures) or multi-directional with greater possibilities of power sharing (horizontal structures).	Individual power can be used to increase the power of other individuals. Power can be expanded (it is only not expanded when compared to the power of others). Collective power develops mutual or reciprocal power, not comparative power. Interaction empowers without removing it: when groups coordinate, synchronize and articulate efforts, horizontal power increases. Synergy is collective power. "Power over" is not the same as "power with".
Utility	The need of doing something and doing it well.	Organize specific and clear tasks. Be careful so that each person can contribute with something useful and that this usefulness is acknowledged.
Meaning and belief in the group	Groups that believe in their reason to exist have many more behaviours that are coherent with their aims.	Believing that the group is part of the meaning favourably predisposes its wellbeing. If the meaning affects the members of the group, many of the individual motivations melt into the collective.

<p>Protection: Security</p>	<p>Tries to diminish risks, avoid dangers, defend himself in order to not lose positions. It works in logic opposed to social significance, innovation, or change.</p> <p>It entails the risk of routine and can make the group's existence unfeasible (no tasks or commitments are adopted, or defensive and aggressive positions are adopted)</p>	<p>Value that caution and calmness bring caution and soundness.</p> <p>Care about the form and the moments of evaluation</p> <p>Generate spaces of trust</p>
<p>Understanding: Learning and knowledge</p>	<p>Humans naturally seek knowledge and this produces wellbeing and pleasure. It is a central process in intelligence. Learning is social.</p>	<p>Groups that include the idea of learning as a positive experience better confront new situations; codify difficulties as challenges and changes as opportunities for learning.</p> <p>Group learning fosters a less exclusive perception of social significance.</p> <p>We learn in the group and the group learns through the interaction, experiences and shared tasks.</p>
<p>Affection:</p>	<p>We are social beings and usually we need to know that someone will take care of us and often we need to take care of someone. Knowing that we are relevant for others will make us feel more motivated to do things.</p>	<p>Balance the group orientation to the task with the group care spaces (sometimes by starting a meeting with a short "emotional round" saying how we feel that day, so that the others are aware.</p> <p>Create a care atmosphere and not just care spaces (where people are aware of how the others are and take that into consideration. Very important to balance this with the task. A working group is not a therapy group. Leisure and security have very strong links with this motivation.</p>

<p>Leisure: Humour</p>	<p>It is a key emotional and intellectual experience in the life of groups.</p> <p>An activist that is sad is a sad activist</p>	<p>It is used to highlight situations, to form the group, to get out of difficult situations, to reduce defences or take on failures.</p> <p>If you laugh with others you are able to do more things with them.</p> <p>It is not a matter of developing humour, but of given space and legitimacy to occasions and situations that enable and even require it.</p>
<p>Personal identity and feeling of belonging to the group</p>	<p>We have the need to recognize ourselves as individual and unique beings, and we do it more from the differences with others than through similarities (although seeing oneself as others is also motivational). This is a motivation that moves between the trend to project us as different and the one that tries to homogenize us.</p>	<p>Being in a group means trying to solve the debate between differences and similarities with others.</p> <p>Taking advantage of opportunities granted by the difference between each member of the group (e.g., different abilities)</p> <p>Provide spaces of agreement</p>
<p>Creation and initiative</p>	<p>People enjoy creating, contributing with something</p>	<p>Collective creation is the perfect synthesis given that it satisfies the motivation of individual creation at the same time as it enriches the group as such.</p>
<p>Freedom</p>	<p>Freedom of election, of choosing what we want, of saying what we need, always balanced with respect to the others</p>	<p>Flexible structures that allow different levels of participation and engagement</p> <p>To follow a compromise philosophy instead of an obligation philosophy (doing things because I feel I am compromise with the group is very different than doing things because I am forced by the group)</p>

Interactions inside groups

Interaction is the essence of a group. It constitutes the basic behavioural unit of the group. Through interaction a group can become more than an addition of the parts.

Getting to know a group is looking at its behaviour and at the dominant forms of interaction.

We can usually observe several kinds of interactions in a group. The difference between some groups and others is the relative frequency of each of these interactions, which are normally mixed and not in a pure state.

In the table of interactions, we include a possible classification of interactions, its definition, how it happens, and how to work on it from the point of view of Intelligent Groups (these should tend to improve and favour summative and multiplicative interactions).

Type of interaction	Explanation	Tips to deal with it
<p>VOID OR MINIMIZED</p> <p>When there are two persons that do not cause any reaction in others.</p>	<p>It derives from no participation due to fear (and reproaches, reprisals, signs of anger) or apathy. It also derives from systematically considering that contributions made are not taken into account and are useless.</p>	<p>Create trust environments:</p> <p>Value all contributions</p> <p>Give space for all members of the group to contribute (in different moments)</p> <p>Make “snake” leadership explicit (see leaderships)</p>
<p>WARLIKE</p> <p>When the partner is positioned in the role of an enemy or aggressor. Everyone talks and no one listens.</p>	<p>People interpret that interests are conflicting, although it is not necessary that they exist. It is closely linked to power motivation. It is filled with errors such as overgeneralization, false isolation or negative selection.</p>	<p>Change the topic, take a break, change the task</p> <p>This interaction has to be treated with a preventive communicative policy (communicate the problems but not always in a big group)</p>
<p>SYSTEMATIC OPPOSITION</p> <p>A person says A, and immediately another says No A.</p>	<p>Closely linked to social significance. What is A? A proposal that requires effort and achieves social significance. What is No A? A negative opinion on A that requires much less effort and also obtains social significance. It is more “profitable”.</p>	<p>Make explicit and agree a person that assumes the role of pointing out the problems that appear and that are linked with interaction at moments when the discussion gets stuck.</p>

<p>FALSE OPPOSITION A person says A, and immediately another says No A'</p>	<p>A person says A, and another immediately slightly modifies the proposal and creates A'. Then this second person opposes A', therefore No A'. This is a false opposition. For example, A: It is important to talk to a specific (similar) Political Party. Answer: No A': It is seriously harmful for us to talk to any political party, especially those that talk to the opposition.</p>	<p>Make explicit and agree a person that assumes the role of pointing out the problems that appear and that are linked with interaction at moments when the discussion gets stuck.</p> <p>Treat each problem independently.</p>
<p>ADDITIVE When an idea or contribution is followed by another without opposition</p>	<p>Additive interaction enables the observation of parallel processing in the group. Several ideas circulate without them being in opposition.</p>	<p>Help solve various types of problems, characteristic of a first phase of creative thinking.</p>
<p>MULTIPLICATIVE When contributions cause other contributions that improve them</p>	<p>A person presents an idea that causes the appearance of another idea in another person that would have not appeared without the existence of the first. Multiplicative interaction causes the group to be more than the sum of individuals.</p>	<p>Better in horizontal groups. It requires intelligent listening, hypothetic thinking, and temporal sacrifice of leadership.</p>

Leadership

Leader and Power

It is usual to relate leadership jobs with power, especially when the leadership role is not specified but works “in the shadow”, when there is not an agreed structure, and we move inside the logic of “tyranny of lack of structures”¹².

However, when people recognize the value and capacity of others in particular moments, on concrete issues, in specific tasks, in talents and abilities, in emotional skills (in anything that the other knows), and considers the other as someone from whom to learn and who can teach us how to grow, then we have a relationship of authority recognition.

Authority, unlike power, works between people given that someone recognizes it in you, or that you recognize it in another. Someone of recognized authority that does not have power can help grow, make people more able of choosing and freer. It does not, on the contrary, impose its criteria, manipulate, or subject those who recognize it.

We return to the repeated idea that power (“power over” other people, imposing, subjecting, manipulating, and exerting any type of violence...) is not the same as “power with”, which refers to the ability of making a collective, of grouping abilities and knowledge for something.

In order to make people in a group and the former feel comfortable, seen, recognized, and cared for, it is important that authority moves, that roles are not monopolized and stereotyped, that we put forward horizontal leadership, that we create an environment of trust and non-forced acceptance, and that each person can express him/herself from their singularity and looking after the relationship with others.

Leader or Leadership

These terms have worked as synonyms for a long time and generated confusion. This indicates a deep-rooted vertical culture. If we consider leader and leadership as the same thing, we place power in a fixed place and in a single person. Practicing horizontality forces us to distinguish between both terms.

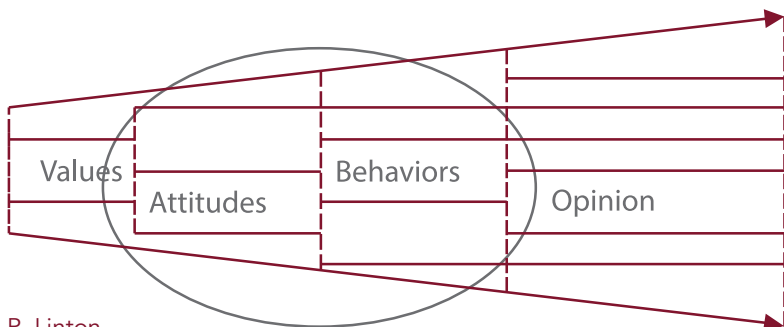
12. Jo Freeman (1970): “La tiranía de la falta de estructuras”, www.angelesalvarez.com/doc/latirania.doc.

The role of leadership is inseparable from groups, in other words, all groups need action instructions, simply because it is impossible for everyone to act simultaneously. Once the role of leadership is solved through the leader, he/she will decide on the majority of instructions for action. However, the leadership role can be solved in other ways such as through rotation, factions, members' bodies, the assembly, habits, or collective building.

Leadership behaviours are those that regulate the groups' action and, therefore, can be extremely varied. Following are some of the most relevant:

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1. <i>Convene meetings.</i> | 2. <i>Design the meeting's minutes.</i> |
| 3. <i>Forming the group.</i> | 4. <i>Solve problems.</i> |
| 5. <i>Successfully putting forward actions and projects.</i> | 6. <i>Modify the group's structure.</i> |
| 7. <i>Make take decisions.</i> | 8. <i>Set tasks.</i> |
| 9. <i>Assess others' proposals.</i> | 10. <i>Motivate people with the group's aims.</i> |
| 11. <i>Reinforce and punish others' behaviour.</i> | 12. <i>Create the group's culture.</i> |
| 13. <i>Veto decisions.</i> | 14. <i>Represent the group.</i> |

Therefore, leadership requires numerous abilities that are rarely (or never) found in a single person. Given that a leader can be anyone who contributes to the group and has the ability and commitment to carry them out with others' support, everyone can be leader in a certain context.



R. Linton

Positive leadership manages obtaining benefits for the rest of the group, either as proposals, obtaining resources, or emotional wellbeing. It is a complex task given that the group confers part of the power to the people exercising it according to individual and collective benefits that they bring.

A last argument that shows the need for multiple leadership is that the group does not need the same type of leadership all the time. For example:

- The group knows but does not want to. In other words, there is a lack of motivation or confidence. Leadership would here have to provide the group with participation, support, collaboration, and reinforcement. We would need, above all, socio-emotional abilities.
- The group wants but does not know. The group lacks the ability and confidence in itself. Here, leadership would have to reinforce positive willingness to do, explain, clarify, and give specific instructions. These abilities are related with persuasion.
- The group knows and wants. Here, the collective is capable and has good willingness. The role of leadership would be to delegate, provide autonomy, trust, guide, suggest, and reinforce the achievements. All are related with delegating.
- The group does not know and does not want. There is lack of security and motivation. The role of the leader would be to guide and direct giving clear and specific instructions, reinforcing small achievements. Guide is the key.

Factors that Increase Leadership

Group members have the tendency to be influenced by some more than by others. The ability to influence the group is a dynamic construction of the group members.

The factors that increase the capacity to influence in the group, far from building a profile, show numerous ways to participate in the leadership role. All these factors interact with each other:

Specific abilities and knowledge in relation to the group's central aims.	Credibility.
Capacity to generate initiatives.	Wisdom.
Communicative charisma and capabilities.	Work.
Organizational position.	Capacity to establish positive affective relations.
Problem solving capacity.	Support from a higher structure.
Conflict resolution position.	The group's time and experience.

A group can make everyone participate more in leadership, even those who do it more. It is easier to increase all members' leadership capacity than to equalize everyone's mutual influences.

A recurrent strategy in many groups, used to increase multiple leadership, has been to lower the activity of the person with greater leadership. This strategy is rarely successful as it usually leaves uncovered the tasks that this person used to carry out. Moreover, it does not substantially alter other's involvement. It is much wiser that the leader strengthens the others' leadership, opening space for them and helping create a multiplicative leadership, even if this also results his/her own increased leadership. Leadership is not zero-sum, everyone can increase their contribution.

In the following chapter we will see how Facilitation is a role inside the group with a specific type of leadership (many of the leadership behaviours and the factors that increase leadership are behaviours and factors needed for a good facilitation)

Group Roles

In our groups, formal and informal roles are developed. They are all positions created in a group which fulfill a function. They are qualities or parts of the group field that emerge and give us information. Roles are usually occupied by people, but a role is always more than one person (i.e., it can be occupied by several people at different times) and every person is more than a role (sometimes we play a role in a group and we think that we are only that role, but people have a richness and internal diversity to be able to inhabit different roles in a group or in different groups).

The roles are constituted by a set of:

We consider that roles have two components. A vertical one, which is the life story of each person, their socialization, their culture, etc. This is the reason why often people take certain roles in different groups they are part of. But the role also has a horizontal component, which is the one that comes from the group itself and the role play that is given. This is why we can often find very different roles in different groups.

There are many different classifications of the roles in a group. Here we suggest one (by Jose Luis Escohorihuela, Ulises 2012):

Productive Roles	Roles of care (these are important for the group processes, they help to avoid any type of oppression or aggression in the group)
Initiator. It presents initiatives, proposes ideas and sustains them.	Facilitator. Take care of the group process.
Dissident. It evaluates, criticizes and, if necessary, opposes the initiator's proposals.	Mediator. Conflicts mediation between members of the group. Also: conciliator, peacemaker, harmonizer...
Follower. Accept the ideas of others and amplify their value, giving their support to one or the other.	Animator. It brings energy and encouragement to the group, valuing and celebrating achievements and interventions.
Informer. Search and provide information, useful for the group.	Caregiver. He cares about the emotional health of group members.
Creative. It brings creative ideas to solve the problems of the group and to reduce the tension in case of conflict.	
Other roles: coordinator, organizer, expert in procedures, who takes notes (photos, videos, etc.) and keeps track of group progress, etc.	

Facilitator as a role of care

Facilitation is a set of tools, techniques and skills to ensure the good group work, both in achieving their goals and realizing their collective vision, and in creating a relational climate where there is trust and a fluid, empathetic and honest communication. The facilitator is an explicit (or implicit) role in groups that supports all the “voices” to be heard and appreciated. The facilitator role has different functions:

- **Leadership** Commitment to create the group that people want to belong to.
- **Production** Progress in achieving the group goals.
- **Regulation** Mediation in the exchanges between the parties.
- **Elucidation** Manage the difficult times, be aware of what is happening and propose solutions to move forward.

What a facilitator does (by *Rosanna Von Sacken*) includes four key pillars:

- A facilitator carefully selects and plans appropriate group processes, methodologies and techniques in his/her design, based on what is known from the scoping phase.
- A facilitator actively interacts with and engages the participants during a session, using suitable group processes, which s/he will adapt and change as needed.
- A facilitator is process- and group-centric; s/he remains as neutral as possible on content and results.
- A facilitator helps the group to achieve agreed upon and desired outcomes.

The facilitator is a role of care. Is focus on taking care of the processes and of the people, because is not attached with the contents that the group is working with.

Tips for facilitators:

How a facilitator can take care of the people (members of the group)?	
Maintain a safe and trustworthy space:	Interrupt attacks. Project confidence in the group. Admit and correct our own mistakes. Never leave the group.
Become aware of how we communicate:	Active and intelligent listening, empathy, openness, curiosity, nonverbal language, learning
How a facilitator can take care of the group process?	
Balance participation	
Pay attention to the type of interactions that occur in the group, trying to maximize the multiplicative and additive	
Feel the group climate and frame it	
Propose breaks every hour and a half	
Use your own sense of humor to create a warm atmosphere	
Design the process and the agenda of the meetings carefully	
Use techniques to allow the collective intelligence emerge	

Some of the main techniques that a facilitator uses are:

- **Synthesize:** summarize the content and/or process that frames and/or integrates all parts.
- **Paraphrase:** repeat what you have heard in your own words.
- **Use open questions:** are questions that do not seek an adequate response (or yes or no ...). It is important not to value the answers, with different evaluations (some good, some bad...).
- **Deepening questions:** to use questions that allow deepening in an aspect of what was just expressed.
- **Framing:** Bringing awareness to the process, process vision, positions..

Personal skills are also important to become a good facilitator, to develop the current tasks and functions. Here the main ones:

Ability to detach myself from content	Admit and correct your mistakes
Emotional intelligence (to recognize your emotions and to know how to handle them)	Believe in the group
To be a welcoming person	Positive attitude
To be a patient person	Have the ability to synthesize and frame
To be a flexible person	Ability to understand the group atmosphere
Have physical resistance	Ability to empathize with different visions or ideas
Ability to face conflict	Ability to group ideas
Have a sense of humor	Ability to give nonviolent feedback
Be a good communicator	Ability to generate cohesion within the group
Have a good memory	

UNDERSTANDING CONFLICTS¹³

We cannot separate conflict from diversity and life. Where we find homogeneity, there is no conflict, there is no tension, but there is no movement, nor life. Our great challenge, as human beings, is to maintain and appreciate diversity - necessary for life to continue existing on this planet - as we learn to recognize the underlying unity, so that we can live the encounter with the different, perhaps with tension and difficulties, but without getting to violence, aggression or (self) destruction.

In common language, the terms "conflict" and "problem" are usually considered exchangeable but we must differentiate these terms. A problem is actually a barrier or difficulty that must be overcome in order to get what we want. In conflict one's interest becomes the other's barrier. When conflict is seen as a shared problem which both sides must solve, the chances of finding a solution will increase.

Logics to face conflicts

We can classify the logic we use to manage a conflict in three big categories: Domination, negotiation, encounter...

Domination: The final goal is to dominate, impose one vision or one interest over the others. Taking the game theory approach, this logic will end up, in the best case scenario with a win-lose solution (1-0) and in the worst, but quite frequent scenario in a lose-lose solution (0-0). These logics look for the final surrender of the others using (mainly) coercive methods. In a simple conflict between two friends, to decide if they go to the cinema or to drink and eat something, the domination logic end up going to the cinema or to a restaurant but by coercive methods ("I am the one who has the money, so I decide") or doing nothing ("ok, stay alone with your money, keep your money for yourself")

Negotiation: These logics include a discussion between the confronted sides looking for a final agreement. Negotiation is affected by many factors and by the attitude of the confronted sides when coming to the discussion is crucial for final agreement. It can end up in a similar way than the domination logics (1-0, 0-0) because either there was an "enemy" attitude and none of the sides accept any modification neither any intermediate

13. Gaia Education http://cv.uoc.edu/web/~mcooperacion/aulas/gaia_esp/Social/Facilitacion/ComprenderConflicto.html

position and at the end, one just wins (“today we go to the cinema. We will see what we can do another day”), or both sides end up abandoning the negotiation with the consequent failure (Cinemas and restaurants are already closed). But they can also reach solutions close to the 1-0 because one of the sides is just more flexible and it doesn’t consider that is making any fundamental concession or just because it considers that avoiding the conflict is more important than winning.

The negotiations that obtain better results are those that prevent that neither party stays to 0 and try to satisfy as much as possible the interests and needs of every side (“Today we go to eat and drink something, but we can buy the tickets to go to the cinema tomorrow, or we can stay at home watching a movie and eating something”). One of the problems in negotiations is that is easy to stay in the “enemy” attitude and in many occasions it implies “giving in to what you do not want”. It can cause that in the future it “takes a toll”, (leaving “outstanding accounts”) and then they depend on all the conditions of the agreement (finally, they couldn’t go to the cinema next day because there was something urgent, and the conflict came harder the next time).

Encounter logics are those that try to change the conflict vision into a “problem” vision. What was an interest confrontation is seen now as a problem affecting both sides and where we try to work together to satisfy the needs and interests of both sides. A win-win approach (“let’s go to the summer open-air cinema, where we can eat and drink something while we see the movie and we can stay in the open terrace of the cinema when the movie is over”).

Violence as a way to solve the conflict is a domination logic, and in the best cases close to negotiation (usually unbalance negotiations), while nonviolence is in between negotiations (in the worst scenarios) and encounter (in the best cases).

And nonviolence seen as a social construction, as it was presented in the first chapter, it allow us to avoid classic conflict management approaches, that address each dimension of the conflict in a separate way, and it present us a conflict transformation approach very close to the social transformation approach, where the conflict is addressed in all its dimensions.

An important lesson of this approach (the nonviolent one) is to change our attitude of avoiding conflicts, to an approach of interest and openness. This means putting aside the perspective that speaks for “winners and losers”, and adopting a new perspective in which “everyone wins.” “Win-wins” solutions are more likely to happen in a group when all parties involved have had occasion to express their voices and be heard and understood.

Types of Conflicts

Conflicts may arise due to one or more of the following reasons;

Goods and material profit	Principles and points of view
Communication	Power
Security	Workload, tasks, work
Functional solutions	Relationships
Meta conflict	

Goods and material profit: the different parts in the conflict fight over goods, objects, resources, financial profit. Conflict starts when the goods are scarce and the distribution is considered unfair. They are usually “plus zero” conflicts as what one obtains comes from what the other loses.

Principles and points of view: the movements of part of the group question another part’s moral or ethical principles. If these principles are relative, they can be negotiated but if they are absolute, they normally bring about important shake ups and break ups within the group. Conflicts related to absolute principles and fundamental dignity are usually irreversible. The issue here is where to draw the line of absolute principles. If we are very strict, conflicts will increase. If we are more flexible, it will be easier to deal with conflict in terms of a negotiated solution. Sometimes, what is considered absolute is not actually so (e.g. being on time as an essential principle of respect). When this happens, the group is incapable of solving its conflicts. We must not mistake dignity for severity although the latter is often camouflaged by the former. Groups that work in a collective way find better options of facing their problems regarding principles.

Communication: Most problems within a group are related to communication and those that are not, usually become more complex due to problems in communication. Although communication is the key in solving most conflicts, it is also the most fragile resource. The communication channel suffers interference or deteriorates quite quickly. Even when both sides in a conflict agree on the problem being down to communication, it is often difficult to assume the cost and risks of reopening the communication channel. “I admit I made a mistake but I’m not going to let anybody call me such and such.”

When both sides think it beneficial to use communication to “unwind”, the resource becomes even more deteriorated. Most of what is called

“unwinding” is nothing but a kind of aggressive and clumsy type of communication. Although on some occasions unwinding may move us away from passivity and resignation because it lets us gather our strengths in order to say something we would not say under normal circumstances, it does not generally liberate; it usually just produces new tensions.

Problems in communication can be;

- Due to not sharing the code or the categories in establishing the conflict. This produces many misunderstandings.
- Due to lack of communication and information because of fear or ignorance.
- Due to aggressive communications which provokes defensive positions or counter attacks and does not solve the conflict.

The strategies needed to solve conflict require an enormous effort in carrying out assertive and intelligent communication.

Power: The usual tendency of parts, systems and people to increase their area of influence becomes a conflict when other parts feel that it goes against them maintaining or increasing their areas of influence. In any system there are two ways of increasing power; taking it away from another or making the total power of the system increase. When the goal is to increase comparative power, conflict always occurs because comparative power is always “plus zero”. In comparative terms, when one side increases its power, the other side loses.

Power conflicts are necessary in establishing methods which avoid one part increasing its power by taking it away from others. Horizontal groups find it more difficult to establish the rules that will allow them to remain so but on the other hand they have bigger chances of dealing with power problems as growth for the whole group instead of as loss of power for the majority.

Besides conflicts being about power, they may also derive from power. There are vertical conflicts and horizontal conflicts. In vertical conflicts, there is a clear difference in power and the conflict can be solved by defeating the weakest side. In horizontal conflicts, the big risk is the risk of it spiraling because, despite not winning, both sides are still able to hurt. When conflicts are solved through a more horizontal way of sharing

power, the results tend to be more gratifying. When conflicts are solved through a bigger concentration of power, the results tend to be less satisfactory and often lead to new conflicts.

Security: There is a security conflict whenever the movements or expectations of one of the parts put others' security at risk or those parts feel their security is being threatened. Nobody wants to get hurt or be wronged. "As long as they don't fire us, it's ok". One of the most usual reasons for conflict is a threat to security. Making sure members of the group have a reasonable level of security can help avoid conflict within the group.

On the other hand, total security does not exist and a disproportionate attempt to guarantee absolute security usually brings on new reasons for conflict. Groups must try to have an adequate security strategy but they must also have a strategy that helps them face the necessary amount of uncertainty that movement, novelty and life itself entails.

Workload, tasks, work: uneven and unfair distribution of workload is usually a reason for conflict. Conflicts related to uneven distribution of work often give groups the chance to create more complex and fairer structures. In many groups it may be useful to make sure tasks are distributed adequately while allowing for a reasonable level of variability. By doing so we can avoid conflict spiraling into "if you don't do it, I won't either" situations.

Functional solutions: different ways of doing things, of solving problems and the feeling that some ways are better than others is another usual source of conflict. When the different solutions can bring about differential benefit or harm, the chances of conflict increase. Opening a business earlier than usual may improve service but someone has to get up earlier.

When working in groups, we must bear in mind that there may be several ways of doing things correctly. If one solution is better (according to part of the group), that does not mean that all the other solutions are useless. "Those of you who want to take waste paper to the common recycling box may do so but you can also have your own recycling box". Groups that permit and value a certain degree of diversity are less likely to face conflict in the long run. Some solutions may, however, be critical as they can put the essence of the group or the survival of part of the group at risk. In this case, the group must face the conflict as a problem that must be solved collectively, with ample participation and legitimacy.

Relationships; difficulties in establishing mutual relationships, differences in emotional expectations, different sensitivity when treating or acknowledging others in the group, and sociometric differences (preferring some members instead of others) are usual causes of conflict.

Many professional groups state that they separate “personal” and “professional”. This segregation is not only impossible; it is also uninteresting. What this statement usually means is that personal relationships have deteriorated and there is nothing we can do about it. Groups must deal with personal relationships with flair and intelligence if they want to avoid them becoming a problem for the group. Ignoring them does not usually produce the desired result. People carry their motivations and feelings around with them all the time and they feel hurt or happy depending on what happens in their personal relationships among other things.

Relationships are one of the most fragile aspects in conflict situations and they are one of the costliest losses. Conflict breaks relationships and the possibility of solving the conflict that destroyed them.

Tools to analyze conflicts:

ETENA method:

ETENA is the easy way to remember 5 steps to analyze and start to deal with conflicts by answering 5 simple questions. Here we set up the questions as if you are going to analyze a conflict in which you are involved, but they can be asked also as if you are analyzing a conflict inside a group. This tool can also be used for a group analysis (with the entire group involved).

Steps	Questions	Example
Evidence:	What do I see? What are the evidences, the objective things that I see? Try to take out opinions from the answer to this question	"My neighbor don't look at me or answer me when I say hello every morning"
Thoughts:	What do I think? Here check what are your opinions, what is your interpretation of what is happening	"He doesn't talk to me because he is angry with me and he doesn't like me" (and maybe there are other potential reasons or interpretations)
Emotions:	What do I fell? What are the emotions that this conflict is moving on me	"This makes me feel sad, and a little angry"
Needs:	What do you need to solve this situation?	"I need to feel comfortable with my neighbors and to create a good and trust environment"
Actions:	What are the actions you have to put in place to change the situation?	I can go, knock on his door and talk to him, I can try to invite him for lunch, or bring him some meal ...

Individual, collective, internal, external map of conflicts

Another tool to map conflicts is considering the internal, external, individual and collective dimension of the conflicts.

	INTERNAL	EXTERNAL
INDIVIDUAL	<p>Intention</p> <p>Internal conflict</p> <p>Strong feeling of guilt or resentment with ourselves</p> <p>Anxiety, fear and other negative feelings that arise when exploring our limits</p> <p>Little clarity about what we really value or need</p>	<p>Behavior</p> <p>Interpersonal conflict</p> <p>Differences as threats</p> <p>Low communication skills</p> <p>High combustibility: anger and irritation</p>
COLLECTIVE	<p>Cultural</p> <p>Cultural conflict</p> <p>Style of communication that reflects the violence and aggressiveness of the dominant culture</p> <p>Unconscious use of prejudices, stereotypes and other violent cultural values</p> <p>Binary thinking accompanied by a competitive attitude: "I am right, you do not have it"</p> <p>Abuse of power due to differences in rank</p>	<p>Systems</p> <p>Structural conflict</p> <p>Lack of common vision</p> <p>Exhaustive, unproductive and divisive meetings</p> <p>Lack of important information</p> <p>Different interpretation of verbal agreements</p> <p>No responsibilities are assumed</p> <p>There are no criteria or processes for the entry of new members</p> <p>There is no process for dealing with emotions</p>

Conflict Components

As good as it is to know about the different types of conflicts, it is also helpful to know that most conflicts, small or large, interpersonal or international, follow a pattern quite accurately, characterized by three basic elements.

Conflict arises when we discover our differences and perceive them as a threat to meet our needs (or what we believe are our needs). It feeds on a normally exaggerated emotional response, which accompanies our perception (our combustibility), and is sustained by the unequal distribution of power between humans. Difference, Combustibility and Power are the key elements present in every conflict.

Perceiving differences as a threat	Conflict arises when we perceive differences as a threat to what we value most or when we believe that these differences will prevent us from meeting our basic needs.
Combustibility	Some people have a great facility to make sparks jump in their interactions with others. Others to make the sparks grow and become a big fire (great combustibility). Finally, some people have some control of their emotions and let the sparks go away.
Abuse of power	The unequal distribution of power between people and the different ways in which we use our power considerably influences the number and nature of conflicts.

Escalation of conflicts

Learning to manage a conflict involves being able to identify the different levels a conflict develops before exploding (conflict escalation), and learning to stop the escalation and repair the emotional field by reinforcing the positive aspects of the relationship.

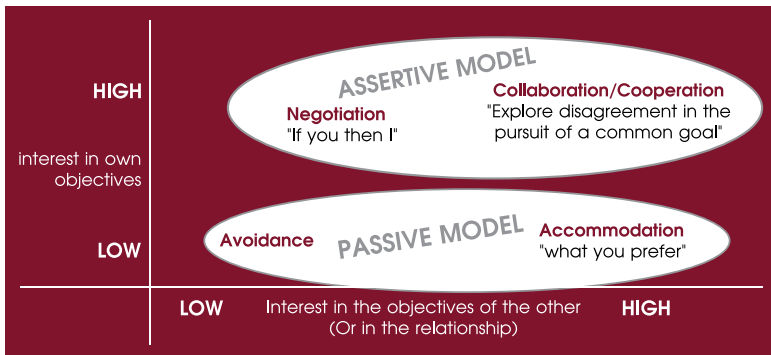
The following list shows different levels of escalation of a conflict, from a first feeling of discomfort to the final crisis that can lead to the dissolution of the relationship. The conflict changes from one level to another, because it changes our perception, attitude, behaviors and feelings.

• Discomfort	Intuitive feeling that something is wrong, with someone or with the group
• Incidents	something unimportant that irritates us, and we tend to forget
• Misunderstandings	produced by poor communication and lack of clarity in expectations

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tension 	<p>permanent state that accompanies our interactions with some people, characterized by an abundance of negative attitudes, a will to hurt</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Crisis 	<p>repressed emotions are released, there may be violence</p>

Attitudes in Conflict

The following table shows the most common attitudes toward conflict. A person may show different attitudes depending on the role they play in the conflict: the attitude will be different in a conflict with their mother, partner, colleague or stranger. The table has been drawn from the two-dimensional conflict model developed by Neil Katz, with two main axes: interests and relationships. For example, a competitive person is more oriented to defend their own interests than to care for the relationship, while an accommodating person prioritizes the relationship over their own interests.



Adapted from Ralph Kilman and Kenneth Thomas (Lederach, 1982)

Although in the first instance it seems that the model of collaboration is undoubtedly the most desirable, none of them should be idealized. The attitude or strategy we adopt in a conflict will depend on many factors that are likely to condition our response.

Transformation process of a conflict ("I win, you win" Helena Cornelius y Shoshana Faire)

Map the conflict

First step: describe the topic in general terms.

It is about identifying the issue, defining the problem broadly. Gather needed information.

Second step: name the people involved.

There may be conflicts where two people are involved; but sometimes there are more people, and sometimes groups.

Third step: what are the needs and fears of each party.

Nine Steps to Conflict Transformation
Create a favorable atmosphere of security and trust.
Clarify perceptions, explaining misunderstandings and exposing perceptive divergences.
Distinguish between positions, interests and needs:
Positions and interests are negotiable. Needs are not negotiable
Difficulty: In structural conflicts, it is not always possible to meet the needs of all parties. It is necessary to change the conflict structure to resolve the conflict.
Problem: Many people find it difficult to recognize their real needs.
Learn to manage our emotions and the response we give to the emotions of others.
Encourage connective elements: the "we" instead of "you vs. me". Inculcate the idea of a "power for", in which we all participate, instead of a "power over", which excludes others.
Project for the future, recognizing and learning from the past.
Promote the language of responsibility as an alternative to guilt: facilitate reconciliation.
Identify and develop feasible gradually.
If possible, develop verbal or written agreements accepted by all affected parties

Tips for Conflict Management

win-win approach	In conflicts we usually have the feeling that if the other win we lose, but is important to know that in group conflict we have also a feeling of interdependence and conflict is common. We can try to use the win-win approach that help us to understand that several times we can work together to define proposal that satisfies the needs of all parties
Analyze the goods and issues at stake	not only see what is at stake but everything that is put into play, see non-material aspects ... sometimes the solution goes through a large non-material loss
Examine the cost of non-agreement	What will we lose if we are not able to manage the conflict? The answer to this questions usually encourages flexibility of positions
Identify the perception of conflict	Ideas as: "they want to appropriate with everything", "they always want to hurt", "they will not do anything" ... conflicts increase negative intentionality ... to detect them and change them for other thoughts helps to address the conflict
Distinguish the original conflict and the new damages derived from the dynamics of the conflict	It is sometimes useful to separate conflicts to go "one by one", to slow down the process (going slow helps in many cases)
Identify the control zone	Often we perceive conflict as a problem of the other, we think it is the other who has to remedy or take the initiative (responsibility in the solution resides in the other. Then distinguish what each can do from the part that controls or what is my responsibility

<p>Perform assertive / non-violent communication</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Find the Right Time (to express) 2. Check my attitude (see what I want to take care of, build or propose, and how am I in this moment to communicate ...) 3. Observation (start expressing what you observe, without judging) 4. Feeling (express are your feelings, without judging or imposing) 5. Need (express what you need without demanding)
<p>Apply the problem solving method</p>	<p>To focus on finding joint solutions instead of hurting the other:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. Define the problem accurately 7. Collect information and try to know the perspectives of the parties involved 8. Generate alternatives and solutions, if possible jointly between the parties 9. Value the alternatives with criteria 10. Choose the most convenient 11. Apply and evaluate them
<p>Have agreed conflict protocols</p>	<p>They will help to create a common security framework</p>
<p>Expand the perspective.</p>	<p>There are times that the conflict closed the field of view, and the parties narrow the perspectives. Sometimes it is interesting to expand it, broadening the perspective to a wider context ... so we can understand the more complex relationships where conflicts are inserted.</p>

And if you are using mediation techniques take into consideration:

Choose the person (s) that both parties must legitimize

Call separately (not always is a must) that the parties express their perspective and possible solutions and see the cost of non-agreement

Mediators / facilitators order the information and return try to find the meeting pieces.

Create joint solutions

And always try to learn from conflicts (it will help in future conflicts management).

NONVIOLENT COMMUNICATION

Nonviolent Communication (NVC), the work of Marshall Rosenberg, seeks to offer a process through which we can begin to develop more consciousness around the impact of language on our perceptions. NVC invites us to pay attention to our language in order to become aware of the internal processes that are set in to motion through it, namely: the process of judging, comparing, attributing responsibility (guilt), administering punishment, demanding and imposing one will over another, as well as emotional processes and decision making processes.

Marshall Rosenberg described the kind of society that is created through our language as “culture of domination”, identifying the concept of “good vs bad” as a pillar for such domination, accompanied by concepts such as “reward, punishment, guilt and shame”.

Language as a tool to define reality

Language and the development of cognitive structures

In the course of human development, on a neurological level, there is an important milestone that involves dramatic changes in areas such as cognition, emotional responses and relationship. Prior to the acquisition of language, the human baby is primarily a sensory being, that means its main channel of interaction with the world around her is the sensory system which transfers inputs from the outside through the nervous system to the inside, where they are processed in an immediate way, that is without the mediation of concepts. The baby therefore lives in a state of sensory activation where all stimuli are perceived at the same time in sense of wholeness and where the responses are also of a sensory nature, related with physiological and emotional needs.

With the acquisition of language, an important change takes place: language offers another way to relate to the environment and its experiences, not just through sensory stimulation but also through concepts that help begin organizing these experiences and giving meaning to them.

Language as transmission of values, beliefs, social norms

With these concepts the baby begins to mediate her experiences and through language she can communicate them to other people. This marks the activation of the part of the brain called neo-cortex and it also marks the beginning of a new phase in human development where the baby begins to take part in her social and cultural environment, absorbing the norms, customs, beliefs which are transmitted through language.

Language as the frame of perceptual processes

Language therefore constitutes the building block on which the cognitive process begins to articulate itself, not only through concepts but through the organization of those concepts, which gives rise to the capacity to create perceptions: the organizing and meaning-giving conceptual framework which encompasses sensory experiences. Our perceptions determine our way of seeing the world and therefore our responses and actions in it. This implies that there is a great degree of "subjectivity" in what we commonly refer as "reality" and language is one of the elements that contributes to such subjectivity in a way which often goes unperceived.

The 4 steps of NVC as a process of consciousness building and differentiation

In NVC we seek to differentiate processes and concepts that are being confused in our language in order to bring about a paradigm change that no longer operates in the logic of "this OR that", "good OR bad" but rather endeavours to include and put the focus not on external moralistic judgment but on intrinsic needs.

The 4 key differentiations are:

- **Observation as different from Judgment, Interpretation, Comparison**

Observation: My husband eats quicker than me

Interpretation: My husband is careless and disrespectful at mealtimes

- **Need as different from Strategy**

Need: I need some rest and order

Strategy: I need you to clean the kitchen

- **Feeling as different from Hidden Evaluation**

Feeling: I am worried and confused

Hidden Evaluation: I feel lied to

- **Request as different from Demand**

Request: Would you be ok if we went to visit my grandparents this weekend'

Demand: We have to visit my grandparents this weekend

The key role of Needs and Strategies

One of the main contributions of NVC is the identification of Needs as universal motivators for action. In NVC we speak of Needs as "the manifestation of Life itself which seeks its own fulfillment through each living being". That puts us in touch with an understanding of Needs that is very different from the usual one, based in the idea of lack and weakness. Rather, our Needs are a manifestation of the energy of Life that unites all living beings inviting us, through the fulfillment of Needs, to enrich Life. All Needs are considered of equal value, although not of equal urgency, and our aim is to fulfill the greatest amount of Needs without jeopardizing any.

The main confusion in our language is that we speak of Strategies as if they were Needs, one of the main factors which contributes to conflict. Our strategies are the actions that we chose, more or less consciously, in the attempt to fulfill Needs, but whereas Needs are universal, Strategies vary enormously in accordance to many factors such as cultural-social environment, resources available, trauma, habits, level of awareness etc. When we have a conflict it is almost always at the level of Strategies, not of Needs.

The role and purpose of Emotions.

In the same way as we understand judgments and interpretations as a “tragic expression of Needs” (Rosenberg), we can see how our emotions are also a physiological “alarm bell” whose purpose is to alert us to the fact that our Needs are being met or not. In this way we can consider Emotions like a gateway to identifying the underlying Needs that give rise to them.

In this context Emotions are not something to be controlled or managed, rather they are a valuable source of information which allows us to become more conscious of the Needs that are at play in any given situation.

Understanding the human nervous system to facilitate human interaction

The limbic brain and the neo cortex

The human nervous system is a network that includes several organs and many millions neural connections. The brain is a major part of this network and understanding some key features of it can help us a great deal in managing ourselves and our relationships.

The human brain is comprised of three main parts:

The reptilian brain, mainly responsible for all the proper functioning of the vital process of the organism (homeostasis, circulation, respiration, digestion etc.)

The limbic brain, also called mammalian or emotional brain, is concerned primarily for the survival of the organism in its environment. Here we find the 5 basic emotions which alert us to the state of our relationship with and level of safety in our environment: anger, sadness, fear, disgust and contentment. The limbic brain is the first port of call for the evaluation of all sensory stimuli, through a small region called the Amygdala. This area of the brain is receiving sensory stimuli and assessing if the level of safety of the organism is acceptable, transferring the information to the neo cortex for further assessment and decision making. The Amygdala does not have the following functions: language, logic, temporal awareness, awareness and empathy, all functions which reside in the neo cortex.

The neo cortex, the newest part of the human brain in evolutionary terms, is the seat of many specifically human capacities like: language, logic, intuition, spatial and temporal awareness, empathy, analysis, creativity, imagination, awareness etc. Through the collaborative functioning of left and right hemispheres it brings about a very complex series of processes which are making the human organism quite unique in the natural world.

The nervous system in distress

When the Amygdala considers that the level of danger and threat is too urgent to wait for the neo cortex to intervene, it temporarily disconnects from it and takes charge of things through the autonomic nervous system (ANS). The responses that the ANS has at its disposal are basically 3: fight, flight or freeze.

During this process, the connection with the neo-cortex, and all its functions, is temporarily impaired, making the responses quick and impulsive, often out of conscious control. This is a very useful arrangement for life threatening situations, unfortunately though, the evaluations that the Amygdala makes on our level of safety can be, and often are, incorrect due to the lack of bigger perspective, logic, empathy etc. The Amygdala is specifically involved in the experience of trauma, storing the sensory information which relates to the traumatic event and then responding to similar stimuli in the present moment as if the traumatic event was re occurring even though it may not be.

This explains why sometimes we can “lose control of ourselves” and react in ways which we regret later.

The neo-cortex is the place where ideas such as “equal respect for all human life” or a sense of transcendence can be experienced, if we disconnect from it it will be much harder or even impossible to make our limbic brain act in a nonviolent way.

The perception of safety can be influenced by things like beliefs and interpretations, therefore our thought processes are very important in relation to how much our Amygdala is going to get activated or not. It will depend on the situation and the level of insecurity perceived (Higher disconnection in higher threats, and lower in lower threats). In a conflict, it is very likely that people’s Amygdala will be in a state of activation because they perceive themselves to be in danger, which is another way of saying having one’s Needs not met, therefore before we can begin to address the content of the conflict we need to get people back in to a zone of relative safety for their Amygdala to calm down.

Appropriate ways to deal with a nervous system in distress, i.e during a conflicts

It is shown by several research projects that one of the most effective ways to calm the Amygdala is to receive empathy. This specifically means having another human being with us who is interested, calm, open and warm towards our experience. When this happens we are more likely to perceive the other as a “helper” and therefore reduce our sense of danger. We also begin to be able to become aware of how we feel and give names to those feelings, which also calms the Amygdala as it perceives that the neo-cortex is now engaged and dealing with the matter at hand.

Empathy as the fabric of human interactions

Definition of Empathy

There are many ways in which we can understand the word Empathy, in fact we could say that it is a word that contains many other ideas and processes.

Empathy is a process which involves many key aspects of the human being: the physiological, cognitive and emotional aspects are all deeply related and intertwined in the emergence of Empathy.

From a physiological point we are, as all mammals, predisposed to “tune in” to the experience of another being which we perceive to be similar or related to us. This helps us to predict their behaviour, collaborate if necessary and establish a connection.

From an emotional point, getting in touch with the experience of another triggers our own emotional responses which can stimulate a desire to act in a helpful way.

From a cognitive point, our understanding of the situation can help us to better relate to what the other person is experiencing, therefore having more resources to respond.

We could summarize by saying that Empathy is the predisposition to enter another person’s experience with the intention to understand it from their point of view, without judgment and with the desire to offer support and care.

The purpose and role of empathy in conflict resolution and decision making processes

The first purpose of an empathic approach in a situation of conflict is to reduce the activation of the limbic brain in order to be better prepared for a constructive negotiation.

Once that first goal has been reached to a sufficient degree, empathy enables us to connect with the reality of the other person, not to agree, justify it or resolve it, but to identify the Needs that are underlying the conflict. If we can somehow go beyond the ideas and beliefs which people are expressing and connect with the Needs that are underlying them, we

can bypass the “difference” and connect with what it is that unites us, namely our common human Needs. When we are involved in the process of conflict resolution or decision making, some key aspects are:

- Identify people’s beliefs and interpretations and connecting them with underlying Needs
- Acknowledge and honour people’s suffering and distress
- Identify and give value to the Needs that are behind people’s thinking and emotions
- Create strategies that can fulfill the greatest number of Needs without jeopardizing any

Empathy is a key process which allows us to do all these things in an effective and constructive way, however, the main obstacle to Empathy is the idea that someone is “wrong” and therefore does not deserve it. This is a major problem in any conflict, when someone is unwilling to see the other part’s experience because they consider it wrong, illegitimate and essentially bad. It means that we are not prepared to see beyond the level of beliefs in to the human Need that is trying to be met, even though in a very costly way which may be built upon beliefs which we don’t share. We don’t need to agree with people’s beliefs but it is extremely helpful when we can see that those beliefs are there to try to fulfill a Need and maybe we can offer some new perspectives to widen those beliefs from a place of respect for the Needs, not the beliefs themselves.

This understanding of empathy is connected to the encounter approach of Nonviolence as a Social construction of chapter 1. Is what help the people involved in the conflict to have a notion of the “other” different to the one of the domination logic. When we are dealing with others that are similar to us (same aims, same reasons and methods) or just different to us (similar aims, but for different reasons) is easier to have empathy. When the others are “opponents” (aims not compatible and/or against) is much more difficult to act with empathy.

Understand what is meant by “protective use of force”

How to respond in a Nonviolent way when things are not working: the protective use of Force

When we have tried to do all the above things and still we don't see any positive results, we can ask ourselves a few fundamental questions:

- Have we been able to reduce the level of stress?
- Have we identified the Needs of all parties involved, have they confirmed that our understanding is correct?
- Have we made it clear that we are intending to meet everyone's Needs in the same way and to the best of our abilities and resources available?

These are very helpful self-reflective questions, however, there are also other which help us establish if negotiation is possible:

- Do we have access to all parties involved in the conflict?
- Are all parties committed to the idea of treating all Needs as equals?
- Do we have the time and resources necessary to go through a negotiation process before there will be some serious consequences?

If the answer to the last 3 question is “no” it may be the case to call on the “protective use of force”, which means acting in a way that may involve force but not in a punitive way, rather as a way to protect what we perceive to be in danger without trying to bring harm to anyone unnecessarily. In order to achieve this kind of action we need to be firmly established in the paradigm that does not see things in terms of “right/wrong” and “punishment/reward”, but rather understands that all actions are attempt to meet Needs even if through tragic strategies. Therefore we are not acting to punish the “bad” people, we are acting to protect those who are in danger, in the best way we can. The pre-requisites for this to be possible are: having our neo-cortex connected and not identifying the other as the “enemy” but rather as the actor of a tragic strategy which has probably been constructed on inaccurate information, fear, pain, trauma and beliefs which do not treat all Life and all Needs as of equal value.

Where is the line between Empathy and treating all Needs as equals

It is very important to remember that Empathy does not mean justifying actions that cause suffering. Even though I can understand the conditions that made a certain strategy possible and conceivable, I do not have to accept the strategy. This means remembering that all Needs are equal, which means, not just the Needs of those with whom we are trying to empathize, but our own as well. When our Needs are not being met we have the same right as anybody else to express this and request negotiation. If negotiation is not possible, because for example, the other parts don't consider our needs as equal and there is a clear situation of power imbalance, then we have a responsibility towards the fulfillment of our Needs in the best possible way available to us. At times this means not being able to fulfill others' Needs as much as we would like because we are not in a position to understand them or fulfill them in the way they would like us to. We try to protect our needs under a nonviolent approach (chapter 1) not following the domination logic (eliminating or subjecting the other). We will protect our needs while "forcing" the conditions for an empathic negotiation (or having this negotiation or encounter logic in mind even if sometimes we are just able to protect our needs). This is the way that almost every nonviolent movement fighting for social change needs to follow, when the "other" don't recognize their Needs as equals. This is what guides these movements in a situation of confrontation (chapter 1) with the other..

WHAT TO DECIDE AND HOW TO DECIDE

We are constantly making decisions. We take a decision when we select one option among different alternatives. We are taking hundreds of decisions every day, without even noticing what we are doing. Sometimes we don't realize that we are deciding because they are very repetitive decisions, or situations where we don't stop to analyze the alternatives because we already know (we decide to stop and not cross the street when there are cars driving on it without thinking every day that if we continue we will probably have a problem), and some other times we just don't make the decision explicit because we consider that the decision to be taken doesn't require much waste of energy. Of course all the decisions we take are not the same and don't have the same consequences. We can try to analyze the decisions we take as a group according to the topic we are deciding about (What we are deciding), and according to the way we decide (How we are deciding).

What we are deciding: Type of decisions according to the level (consequences inside the group)

The influence of our decision in the group's identity, the number of times we will have to face the same or similar decisions, the level of agreement or adherence that is needed, how many people is affected by our decision, etc... are different aspects that can help us to define what type of decision we need to take:

- **Strategic:** Decisions usually related to the ends and objectives of the group, or the identity of the group. They affect the whole community or group. Usually they are long term decisions and are not very repetitive (we are not deciding about similar things that we already decided). Consequences are usually high and are not so easy to change after taking the decision.
- **Tactic decisions:** They can be decisions that happen more frequently, and the previous information can help on the actual decision process. Consequences can be somehow minimized if the decision was not good.
- **Operative decisions:** Those decisions are more related to routines, procedures that are already known, don't affect the objectives (unless not as single decisions) and have to do more with the daily life of the group.

	Consequences	Repetition	Energy invested
Strategic	High	Low	High
Tactic	Medium	Medium	Medium
Operative	Low	High	Low

Usually in groups, we try to make decisions with the best consequences and the less use of energy (in groups, energy is usually a question of time and human resources), knowing that high level of consequences usually needs more energy investment. The problem comes sometimes when identifying how important is the decision and how much energy do they have to invest on it.

- Is my group going to change significantly after taking the decision?
- How many people are affected by this decision?
- How many times are we going to face the same or similar decisions?
- Does this decision will help us to take future decisions?
- Is the process of taking this decision going to reinforce the group dynamics?

How do we decide: Formal and non-formal decisions

As we said, groups are taking decisions all the time. Most of them don't follow explicit patterns (especially those related to the tactical and operational levels) or are not even considered as decisions: non-formal decisions. But some others do follow explicit patterns or require specific methods of how to take it; formal decisions. The first level (the non-formal) is usually an economizing method and less participative (as it needs less "human resources") and the second one opens the window for more participation and assures the group is aware that it has made a decision.

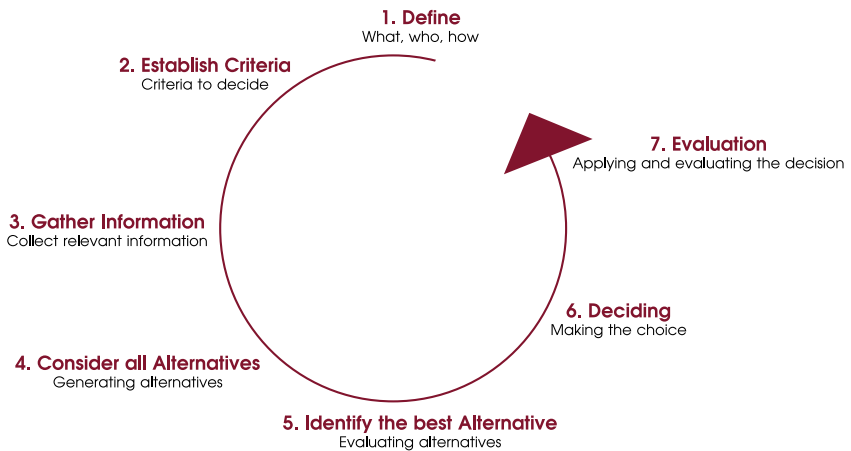
Non formal or economising decisions

Most of non-formal decisions are made to save energy, move forward faster or to avoid irrelevant arguments. As work groups become more operational they make more non formal decisions. This is the positive side of non-formal decisions. The problem with non-formal decisions come when they are overused in groups that are not yet very cohesive or when these decisions are made in order to manipulate and camouflage decisions. Although the non-formal "manipulative" decisions stand out more (if detected) because they cause alarm, in most groups they are far less frequent than the just non formal "economizing" ones.

	When to use them	When not to use them
<p>Negative questions</p> <p>"Is anyone against this?" "Does anyone disagree?" If nobody answers in a short period of time, the debate continues.</p>		<p>When decisions require collective reflection and time to sink in.</p> <p>When relationships are based on fear or when the group has a vertical organization. In this case, decisions are made without the group being involved (people in subordinates positions will most probably not disagree with people in higher positions).</p> <p>When making important decisions (where being aware of the consequences is important)</p> <p>In the case of synchronicity in twos, the perception of the two who answer will give the level of adherence to the decision (if they are not stigmatize it will be consider the voice of the majority)</p>
<p>Negative supposition</p> <p>If someone disagrees with the decision being made (the proposal made) we presume that she will say so and if she does not, we move on</p>	<p>It is a useful and fast procedure in: small groups which are operational with mutual trust</p> <p>With a certain degree of feeling identified within the group.</p>	
<p>Synchronicity in twos</p> <p>"Shall we focus on this point?" "Yes, yes, ok!" (Two people answer while the rest remain silent). We assume the group accepts.</p>		
<p>Faits accomplish</p> <p>(implicit assumption of the decision by individual or a small group, and the group faces a scenario with a decision already taken)</p>	<p>There must be basic trust among the members of the group</p> <p>This type of decisions are not always taken by the same people</p> <p>The experience of this formula having been useful on previous occasions</p> <p>When is clear that the individual or the small group is not following their own interests</p>	<p>The decision is only convenient for the decision maker</p> <p>When the decision makers don't have the credibility of the group</p>

Formal decisions: The decision making process

Formal decisions are what we usually understand by decisions. We talk about formal decisions when the group is collectively conscious of the decision. This is more likely to happen in strategic and tactic type of decisions. Formal decision usually follow explicit patterns to be taken, and these patterns are what we call the decision making process. In groups the explicit patterns usually follow the rational model for taking a decision: *Defining the situation, gathering information, establishing criteria, consider all alternatives, evaluate the best alternative, decide, apply the decision and evaluate the consequences.* As facilitators is important to understand each of this steps and see the specific work needed for each step. Although these steps are a linear process it can happen that we go back and forward in some of them, always before the “Deciding” moment.



1. Define

Every decision making process (when is already explicit) has a first stage where some important elements have to be defined:

- What are we deciding? The type of decision (strategic, tactic, operative),
- Who will decide: identify who will take the decision, according to the previous scenario, to the context, to the type of organization, to the type of decision (strategic decisions in democratic organizations usually need the general assembly to be taken)...
- The method: What is the final method we will follow (see table below with the methods for taking a decision)

The actual decision of making a decision can be more important than the decision itself. On many occasions, true power lies in choosing the decisions that must be made, who will do it, how.

2. Establish Criteria

Before starting the process of identify and generate alternatives it is recommended to think on the criteria we will use to take the decision: If we have to choose our food provider we might have economic criteria (the cheapest), social (the one that respects more the worker's rights) environmental (ecological food), etc... If we do this after choosing the alternatives, it can happen that the criteria will then be influenced by the alternatives we have (depending on the personal interests in each of the alternatives: Ex: After identifying food providers, there is one I like in France, and then I propose a geographical criteria: French companies only).

3. Gathering Information:

In a perfect rational process, with no time limits, the moment of gathering information could take long (knowing all the issues affecting the decision is key to generate better alternatives and to choose the best one). Usually there different constraints, time, interests, availability of information ... Here is important to identify with information is relevant and to find a balance between how much information we need and how much resources we can spend looking for that information.

4. Consider all alternatives:

There must be alternatives in order to make a decision. Sometimes alternatives are simply there: "They are asking us to take part in a project.

Shall we?" (Two alternatives: Yes or No). Sometimes we generate those alternatives (even with the help of external "experts" if needed): When deciding the activities to be done by a group, first we generate the list of activities we could do "Let's think of activities we could do". The meeting process is entirely different if alternatives have been closed or if they have to be generated.

In order to generate alternatives is important not mixing opinions and evaluation of these alternatives when suggesting them (especially if it is done in a group session). Differentiate between proposing alternatives and evaluate alternatives.

Both free debate and brainstorming are very untidy ways of producing alternatives and it is sometimes necessary to work on the set of alternatives so as to present them under some kind of criteria.

Techniques to organize alternatives	
Group them together	Using similarity or proximity to when there are many alternatives, it may be interesting to group them so we have a clearer map of all the proposals. For example, when making decisions about an information campaign, we could put all the alternatives which require external professionals together.
Recognizing incompatibility in articulation	In order to avoid unnecessary debate about alternatives which are perfectly compatible, it is useful to connect them and present them in groups so we can differentiate them from those that are incompatible. Having a big party and saving money may seem like incompatible alternatives but both could be articulated if we ask the guests to bring some food. Having a big party in a small room, on the other hand, is an example of incompatible alternatives.
Differentiate between causality and necessity	Detecting relations between causality and necessity; on some occasions, some alternatives are conditions for other alternatives, so they cannot be presented simultaneously or as excluding alternatives. First we decide if we are going or not, then who is going and finally we decide where.
Giving importance	It is often convenient to set significant or necessary alternatives apart from complementary or secondary alternatives.

5. Deliberation: Evaluating alternatives

This is the moment when the group discusses the advantages and disadvantages of the most relevant alternatives. We must also examine how risky or feasible each alternative is. In free debate, this aspect is combined with suggesting new alternatives.

- Number the alternatives with a list of advantages and disadvantages to each of them is very useful.
- Linking the alternatives to the feasibility and the interest is also very useful. Example:

Steps 1 to 5, and specially steps 3 to 5 can go back and for: New information might appear that open new alternatives or we might identify things that make the method we chose at the beginning impossible. But be careful!!!! Changes or modifications in this "linear process" are very costly in terms of energy inside groups, and therefore they should happen only when it is much needed (frequent changes will end up with full discredit of the decision making process and then losing adherence to whatever is decided).

Two simple rules to guide potential changes and keep group's "health":

Keep legitimacy: Changes in steps 1 and 2 must keep legitimacy. What, who and how should not be changed unless it is done at least at the same level where they were defined (by the same people), and never at a lower level of legitimacy. If it was an agreement of the general assembly the general assembly has to approve the changes, or if it was an agreement of a working group, the same working group or in some cases the general assembly (who potentially has higher level of legitimacy) could change them; "there is a commission ("who") created to decide the food provider ("what"; and the "how" is by delegation), but then the commission identify that all the alternatives are too expensive and it will affect the general budget, and they bring the decision back to the general assembly (Change in the "who" and "how").

Minimize last minute proposals: It is quite often that after step 5, someone comes with another "great" alternative. This alternative can appear very attractive because is new compared to the others that are "old" (it didn't "suffer" all the process of having been evaluated, discussed, and so on), and without being really evaluated it is approved.

This can happen especially in process were evaluating alternatives and choosing the best one was hard. The risk is that if the last great alternative is not really good, it will cost a lot of energy and if this “last” minute alternative happens often it will decrease future engagement in steps 3 and 4 for other decision making process.

6. Decide

This is the part of the process which is considered as the decision itself. It is equivalent to voting, answering the question, expressing consent and refusing. We use the method and the criteria we had to take the decision. After taking a decision it is very important to confirm that it is clear for everyone and that everyone understood the same.

Applying the decision

A decision cannot be considered as such until it has been carried out. The tactic of saying “yes, yes, sure” is based on consenting decisions because we know they will not be carried out.

The group needs to take part in the whole decision making process or at least in part of the process. However, it is not always easy to decide questions such as who suggests the decisions, if anybody can suggest decisions, who presents or generates alternatives, if the people making the proposals will also carry them out or how the group validates decisions.

Formal methods:

	Advantages	Risks	When to use it
Delegation methods			
Initiative and decisions move explicit from the group to a part of the group or to an individual			
One head deciding	It can speed up the process.	To manipulate the decision The decision does not follow the groups usual line of work, but the personal line of work of who takes it	If relationships are positive among the group members There is a trust atmosphere and a high level of identification with the group
Small group delegation	It reduces the energy invested.	There is the feeling that the decision it only benefits the decision maker Information is not shared	The decision maker has a high level of legitimacy There is a positive experience with the method used in previous occasions.
Voting methods			
Two or more options are identify and the group votes its preferences			
Absolute majority: >50% votes	It generally speeds up decision making	The sensation of victory that the winning party feels generates competitive dynamics which makes cohesion and involvement more difficult.	It is a good idea to use this system when the decision is considered less relevant when nobody will feel uncomfortable if her option is not chosen by the group When it is difficult to solve a disagreement and when all alternatives have been discussed thoroughly.
Relative majority: More than one option and the one with more votes wins (just for one vote)		Generates scarce adherence in the "losing" parts. When the "losing" side is always the same, coalitions based on resentment, inhibition or opposition appear, or the "losing" party lives the group	

	Advantages	Risks	When to use it
Wide majority more than 75% or 80% of support	The adherence to the decision taken is higher	It may be difficult to attain (if mixed with consensus this risk is minimized)	After not having reach a consensus, to avoid reduced number of vetoes For strategic decisions (mixed with trying to reach consensus)
Unanimity 100% of voters choose the same option	It may speed up the decision making especially in non-relevant decisions (or in processes where there was space for deliberation and high level of agreement, with no vetoes positions)	Low level of adherence or weak consensus (especially if it was a "yes" "no" option: Unanimity is reached more due to the cost of opposition than to the real level of adherence to the chosen option) It can take many time and energy consuming and it homogenizes the group	Unanimity in formal decisions is more meaningful when there are more options available than when it is just a question of choosing "yes" or "no"
Multiple voting options Everybody can vote every option using at least 3 levels of adherence to each option: Yes, No, Is not my option but I don't reject it	It gives a better picture of the level of adherence to the decision It allows to identify if "the loosing parties" are not always the same It minimize the vetoes positions It contributes to the "encounter" ¹⁴ logics in groups	It doesn't solve completely the veto situations Depending on how we use it, it can bring to decisions that are not against any position, but also not really supported by no one.	It can be used in a consensus process (as part of the process), to simplify options or to make visible the level of adherence to each option. Is very useful in reiterative decisions where the adherence to the different options is very similar (Ex: The day of the meeting: Friday or Saturday)

14. Having three types of logics in conflicts or in group interactions: Domination, negotiation and encounter, where encounter is the one with higher level of adherence and positive outputs.

	Advantages	Risks	When to use it
<p>Consensus methods</p> <p>Consensus is a building process which tries to find or design a position everybody relates to.</p>			
<p>Full Consensus</p> <p>Could be similar to unanimity, but the process to reach it will be different (as the final positions is built by everyone)</p>	<p>Consensus gives equal importance to the end result and to the process used in reaching that result</p> <p>It uses all the different positions as a starting point in order to build a position everybody agrees with</p>	<p>If all decisions are made through consensus, the group's potential might be diminished (if one of the parts does not want to reach such a consensus, the group can only make decisions which are easy to agree on which is often a small and obvious field)</p>	<p>In matters considered essential in the group's existence.</p> <p>In decisions that require great adherence due to a high level of interdependence or because an effort is required of all members (frequency of meetings, proposal to start an indefinite strike).</p>
<p>80% Consensus</p> <p>Could be similar to wide majority, but the process to reach it will be different (as the final positions is built taking into consideration all positions)</p>	<p>Has more chance to create adherence than decisions made by majorities</p> <p>Helps to avoid creating marginalized minorities</p>	<p>Final positions might be those that nobody completely disagrees, but nobody really wants.</p>	<p>In minimums (attendance, essential tasks, some norms).</p> <p>In matters that hold a considerable emotional value for the group or part of the group.</p>

From ideal rational process to “framed” rational process and the role of intuition

Usually the “rational process” described before, if done without any restriction (having all the time possible, to collect all the information, to check all the alternatives and all the consequences of all the alternatives, with everybody full informed, with a clear goal, and with no context conditions) will bring to almost perfect decisions. But usually these ideal conditions never happen and groups use more what is called the “bounded rational” process, which means that they follow rational process but with restrictions and context per-conditions: These restrictions can be related to:

- **Material per-conditions: Resources:** Time is the most frequent one, but also access to information, knowledge or expertise to evaluate the entire situation, is there.
- **Non-material per-conditions: Emotions:** Relations among the members of the group, implicit or explicit alliances, sympathies and antipathies, etc... Use to influence all the decision making process.

Often, some of these conditions push the groups to take decisions in a very limited time or in not the best ideal situation. In those occasions is also quite common to listen “they followed their intuition” “It was taken by intuition”. This intuition is often the synthesis of steps 1 to 5 in the “previous” experience of the group, it is their previous work and life experience (which might not be consciously taken into account) that guided their decision making process.

Decision making in practice

The legitimacy of the decision:

In a group's life there are thousands of decisions. Keeping a high level of legitimacy in the way the group is taking the different decisions is a very good indicator of the group's good health.

Somehow, each decision taken has to be legitimated and the legitimacy will increase if things were done with care:

- **Legitimacy of renouncing:** When people defend methods or proposals that are not the ones that will directly benefit them, just because they are fairer for the group. If this happens in decisions taken by delegation (the group or person who has the responsibility to decide does this) their level of legitimacy and therefore, the level of legitimacy of the decision increase.
- **The chance to be informed:** Sharing information and/or having access to the information used in the decision making process will also increase the level of legitimacy. A person might decide that prefers not to be involved because she doesn't have the time, but she knows she could. This should take into consideration not only making information available, but also giving space and channels to be informed.
- **Transparency-Visibility:** Making the process visible, especially when there is a delegation in smaller groups to do certain tasks (to define the method to take the decision, to give a proposal of criteria...), so that anyone can check how it was done, will increase the level of legitimacy.
- **Confidence by successful past:** Having taken good decisions in the past, and having done good decision making processes will always give legitimacy to the process and will increase the trust in the group. Trust in something to build, not to request.

Tips for groups and tips for facilitators:

These are some ideas we must not forget when making decisions as a group:

Most decisions we make as a group are made without being conscious as a collective that we are actually making a decision. Even in the most problematic groups, most decisions are made without any explicit conflict. However, conflict makes us more conscious about decisions. That is why decision making processes are presented as generating more conflict than they actually do.

Conflict during the decision making process often help improve the decision making system. We must bear in mind that most groups are not born with a well-defined decision making system. The system is modified and it evolves along with the group. Unsolved conflict can also block the decision making process and drive the group to a standstill.

Some members do not have access to the code used in making decisions and thus do not take part because they do not understand (decisions about budget, investment, group history, very specialized content, etc.). This happens more often in heterogeneous groups like school councils or neighbors' associations.

Decisions made with scarce participation produce fewer adherences in the members of the group. In making key decisions that require a high level of involvement, it is important to increase participation even if it takes longer.

Manipulating decisions in someone's benefit leaves a mark on the group and once the manipulation is detected, it affects basic trust which is a key ingredient in an intelligent group.

On many occasions, there are short-circuits between the decision making and the decision making about what decisions to make. "We should all be present in order to decide about this", "it wasn't on the agenda, so we can't make a decision", "this decision is so important that I will only accept consensus", "shall we vote that proposal or shall we vote whether the proposal can be put forward?" Short-circuits can occur when we come across a new situation which has not been explicit or implicitly regulated or because the presumably "losing" part are causing the problem. In this second case, we must try to anticipate contingencies by explaining the decision making system before discussion about the system starts.

The group's meaning or *raison d'être* is the best lubricant in the decision making process. If people relate to this meaning, the whole process becomes much easier. The group allows for a larger number of non-formal decisions and is less suspicious of individual interest and privilege as it sees the group move towards its collective goals. This sense of belonging gives the group a perspective which is sufficiently global so as not to become distracted by little details.

Intelligent groups do not sacrifice expert power (the criteria used by experts in a particular decision) in their decisions on behalf of egalitarianism. In exchange, they demand that these experts socialize and share their criteria and knowledge.

When a decision becomes more difficult than usual, the problem is usually different to the apparently obvious. Ego problems, wounds from previous conflicts, power problems or the feeling of being underrated often affect decision making processes.

Urgency and fatigue are two powerful accelerators in decision making. It is easier to disagree at the beginning of a discussion than after seven hours of uninterrupted negotiation. Decisions are made with more haste when fatigue sets in and we tend to simplify and avoid complexity. When complexity is irrelevant to the decision, it might be useful. Otherwise, it may be a problem.

Finally, decision making processes are highly sensitive to factors outside the process such as group trust, sense of humor, recent success or failure, habits, expectations etc.

And as facilitators it is interesting not to forget:

What do we have to do as facilitators when building and managing an agreement

The facilitator is not the decision maker

The facilitator knows the different mechanism and methods of taking decisions (the how) and helps the group to clarify (if needed) the level of relevance of the decision (the what: Strategic, tactic, operative), but at the end is the group who defines the level of relevance of the decision.

The facilitator contributes to make the decision making process easier (Can help suggesting or contributing to organize the method, when it's an explicit decision in a formal process)

The facilitator tries to be aware of the different type of decisions taken in the group (the what and how) in order to:

- To make visible the how (if needed): The group is aware of what they are deciding.
- To use and share this information in a conflict prevention strategy: If the group is making many "economizing" decisions or many "negotiation" decisions, check the situation of the minorities with these decisions: Are they always the same minorities? Do they really agree?

The facilitator helps organizing the alternatives: Being able to group ideas, recognize incompatibility, identify relations between causality and necessity will avoid many discussions inside the group. But is not the one creating alternatives (or it is not his main role).

Decisions are always related to the whole group dynamic (motivations, emotions, interactions, leaderships, conflicts ...), and a facilitator cannot see a decision making process as something isolated from the rest of the group dynamic.

MEETINGS ASSEMBLIES¹⁵

Meetings are one of the main activities of groups. To work together in one moment or another we will have to meet either to share, to organize, to think together. Here we will describe how meetings should work, thinking on the ideal model of a meeting, and all the steps and elements that should be taken into consideration. The first important element is that we cannot consider meetings as just the moment we are together exchanging ideas, disusing, organizing. We need to think in meetings as what happens before, during and after that encounter.

Before: Designing and preparing the assembly

The success or failure of an assembly depends greatly on how it has been prepared. Although careful preparation does not guarantee success (remember that all the different dimensions included in this manual will always affect what happen during the meeting, as the meeting is just one moment of the group's life), the chances of the assembly going well increase when we plan ahead.

Preparing a meeting or an assembly consists of

- Designing the guidelines or agenda:
 - What** issues we are we are going to work and what we are expecting from each point.
 - When** during the meeting we will talk about each topic and how much time we will use.
 - How** are we going to work over each topic: Which techniques we will use.
- Doing all the previous work (calling the meeting, materials, asking for suggestions...)
- Deciding who will be in charge of coordinating, facilitating and stimulating interaction

15. Excerpts: "Guide for assemblies" Fernando Cembranos and Marta Pascual. Commission of Environmental Education and Participation of Ecologists in Action. Action Books. "Smart Groups" Cembranos, F. and Medina, J.A. Editorial Popular.

Tips to design

What	In democratic groups everybody must have the chance to propose issues for the assembly although that does not mean that everybody in the group has to take part in preparing it
	The mechanics for putting forward issues must be clear so as to make it simple for members of the group
	We must know who is preparing the assembly
	What type of issue or point it is and what we want to achieve with each point (educational, information, suggestion, decision, reflection etc.)
	To choose the topics to be included in the Agenda it is important to combine the urgent with the important. Groups who only solve urgent matters are practical but tend to lose focus.
	We must not forget that there are issues which are better dealt with outside the assembly.
When	If there is something important, but not urgent that could not be included to make it explicit that the topic has not been forget but that it is in the fridge and to clarify when it will be included
	Not only the time, but the order of the topics is important: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To mix the kind of topics so as to make the assembly flow • Decide if longer topics are at the beginning or at the end (same with urgent and important) • Distribute the topics so that prominence is evenly shared • Remember that at the beginning and at the end of the meeting the chances to have less people are higher • Start with a warming up topic (something light or something that will encourage participation)
	Adapt the time and the day to the relevance of the meeting: When the meeting will happen it can have a great influence on how it will work. Meetings late in the afternoon or evening, the last day of the week are usually not the best moments if you need positive and creative atmosphere.
How	Each type of topic needs a specific way of dealing with it (information, deliberation or taking a decision need different procedures).
	Deciding the procedure for each point means knowing; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How the issue will be presented • What participants have to do in relation to the topic • How decisions are made (if any) • How to close the point.

Tips for the work previous to the meeting

Calling the meeting	Who is invited: Be sure that the people who have to inform or participate in a certain topic will come to the meeting Everybody know who is called to the meeting
	Clear and full information: date, starting time, ending time (how long the meeting will take), place, issues (agenda: we must sometimes be very specific about each point, including what are we expecting from each point, if there is a decision to be taken)
	How: E mail, posters, the press, traditional mail etc. (adapt the channels to the people that is called to the meeting)
	When: If the topics are very important we need to call for the meeting with time (if we are going to decide about the future of the organization we cannot call for the meeting the day before).
Work material	Prepare the logistics needed for each topic (projector, blackboard, flip-charts, blank papers, ...)
	If the topic is important, and some information was sent before the meeting, don't assume that everybody will bring copies of what has being sent.
	The conditions of the space can also affect the way the meeting goes: If it is a very noisy place, or there is no space to sit in circles, or is to big to listen to everybody without speakers...
Asking for preparation	Check what each topic of the agenda needs to be done before the meeting: Some proposals needs to be shared before the meeting, some information needs to be clarify before the meeting.
	Sharing information before the meeting might save time during the meeting.
	Sending to much information will not encourage people to read it (unless the group is very motivated). Finding the balance between what can be prepared and what should be prepared before the meeting is always a challenge for the people preparing the meeting.
	Sometimes opinion over certain topic is needed before coming to the meeting and we can do a previous survey or some topics can be previously discussed using on-line methods, this previous request could help to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare the most suitable atmosphere • Get people more engaged • Increase motivation • Increase the quality of suggestions done during the meeting

Neutralizing potential conflict

Different positions often produce conflicts. Whenever possible, the group must act to prevent them. It may be useful to carry out some research in looking for friction points and trying to reduce the tension. Looking for common ground, talking to each part separately, and acting as a mediator can help avoid mechanical disagreement (which is produced due to the differences in procedures) and stop assemblies turning into all out battles.

The assembly is not usually the best place to deal with personal conflict because making concessions in public is more difficult.

During the meeting

Once the meeting is about to start, it is worth to think on the care work, what has to be done to take care of the group, how can we improve the meeting atmosphere by taking care of the people (as well as taking care of the place).

Reception and care work

Feminism has taught us that assemblies are meetings of people with biological and emotional needs which affect the assembly although they are often silenced.

They relate to “care” tasks. We must make sure we have water, shade if we are meeting outdoors, that the temperature is reasonable, that we have food if the assembly is going to be long, that we have an area for children, chairs for senior citizens. It is also important to carry out “reception” work so that participants feel at ease. An assembly can also be a place where we practice and observe the importance of care between people.

It may also be a good idea to welcome new people personally while we explain what has been discussed, the context, our customs, our rules, the way we do things and why we are doing what we are doing. We could also explain the way they can take part. A simple reception protocol is always useful in avoiding confusion.

If that is not possible, we could hand out a short text explaining the way we work.

Inside the meeting

At the beginning of the meeting it is important to remember the agenda, the times for each topic, what we expect from each topic (if it is information, deliberation, decision) and what are we expecting to reach in that session, and also the time when the meeting will finish.

It is also important to make clear at the beginning of the meeting the roles during the meeting: Who will be facilitating, and if there are different people for the different facilitation tasks of the meeting: Moderating, taking notes, time keeper, taking turns for participation...

And once we start, do not assume that everybody has read the papers you sent them before the meeting because that is rarely the case. If we are dealing with a key issue, we might give participants a few minutes to read those papers although it may penalize those who have read the text previous to the meeting.

Techniques

We are used to think on meetings as places where we will all be together all the time, and where the procedure to discuss a topic is; presenting information, discussion, and then deciding over the topic. This might be the best option for many different things, but is not the only way to work in meetings, there are different options and techniques

Some usual procedures are:

- Presentation of the issue, free debate (combination of suggestions and assessment), informal decision making and summary of agreements.
- Presentation of the issue, providing information, making suggestions, assessing suggestions, deciding about alternatives and summarizing agreements.
- Presentation of the issue, brainstorming and close.
- Presentation of the issue, group work, putting groups' ideas in common, free debate, decision making and summary of agreements. We can also have space to work individually, and we can divide the group if the task requires doing it.

Dividing the group:

This format offers such obvious advantages for interaction that it commonly prevails in processes designed on a communicative basis.

Small work-groups increase opportunities for attention, participation and cooperation around a shared task and allow their members to express their different approaches and opinions easily. More people will participate and will be engaged with the task working in small groups than all together in the big group.

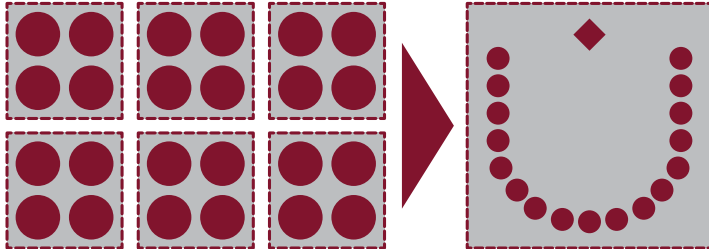
When to divide groups
When we are interested in hearing everybody's opinion. (E.g. When we assess a campaign).
When we need more ideas about a topic than we are able to get through free debate or when the group is large and we do not have much time.
When tasks can be easily split up in parts. For example, when dealing with different aspects related to preparing a social market fair.
When we have a short time for a given task because we can work simultaneously.
When we need to activate and involve a lot of people in the group. For instance, when preparing a strategic plan.
When we do not want the most active members of the group to make the decisions. It is more difficult to block, manipulate or control five groups than one.
When we think it might be more interesting to group people with other like-minded members.
When we think it might be interesting to group people from diverse groups (e.g. young and old).
When we want to learn and train assembly tasks like moderating, coordinating or being the spokesperson.
As preparation for a large group debate because it allows more people to provide ideas.
In general terms, when people have taken part directly, they feel more capable of facing the larger group and more involved in the final result.

Tips how to decide the size of the small groups:

- For tasks that require a high level of cooperation, attention and convergence around a topic it is generally better to choose small groups; from 2 to 4 is generally the best size. (For example, making an assessment panel with indicators to measure the achievement level of a certain goal.)
- If the main priority is to exchange viewpoints and contrast diverging ideas, large groups will be the most suitable; from 7 to 9, or even some more. (For example, making comments about the strong points and weaknesses of an assessment system according to various standards.)
- Groups of 5-6 usually are a good combination for both, cooperation, concentration and allow diverging ideas.

Sharing information

The limits set by the fact that not everybody can listen to everybody else may be solved—at least partly- through a carefully designed idea-sharing plan.



Spokespersons:

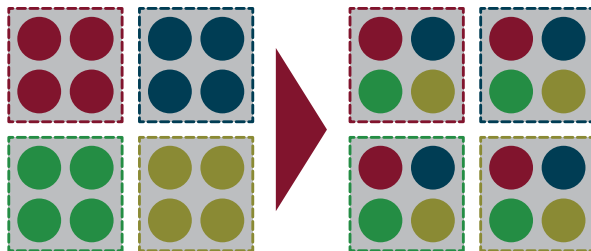
The most classic sequence for exchanging the methods and results of each group has already consists in presenting the work done by the groups to the whole assembly through a spokesperson.

This could be very long, and the time the presentation takes should be in proportion to the importance the topic has for the group (people from other groups might disconnect when listening to other's groups presentation). The following measures are intended to prevent presentations that are too long:

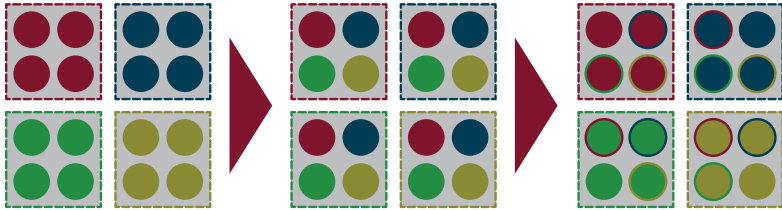
- Define the time that groups are going to have for their presentation before they actually start to work and warn them during the presentation if they are taking too much time.
- Suggest that the groups use support material, such as a large sheet of paper, to present their product. This will not only improve the visibility and organization of their presentation but also reduce the risk of exceeding the time limit and help focus listeners' attention.
- If writing the contributions of the groups on the blackboard, suggest that the speakers do not repeat these contributions in their presentations, unless there are important nuances to highlight.
- Consider another feasible option, which is not to make presentations to the whole group but to collect the group contributions on some kind of material support, then give them out to each participant so that he or she can look through them after the meeting.
- Tell the group to decide who will be the spokesperson at the beginning and tell him or her to concentrate on the important ideas (try to summarize).

Group of experts

We divide the time into two main moments. In the first, a group task is carried out. In the second, another group task is carried out by new groups formed by one member of each original group. This ensures that the information generated reaches all the new groups formed in the second moment. It is a useful combination when the results of the first step are needed to approach the second task; or when the task for the first groups is the same and you want to compare (and to be sure everybody understood); and it is even more useful if the first groups carried out different tasks and they are all necessary to perform the next ones.

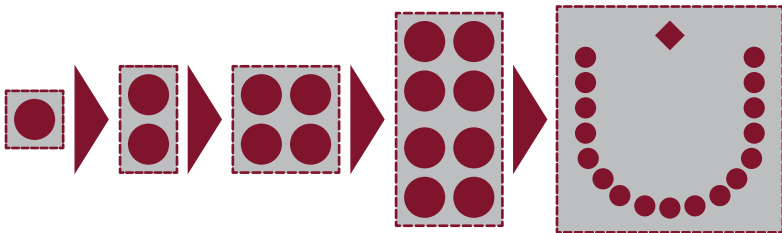


A third step can be added to this sequence. It consists in returning to the composition of the first groups, thus obtaining a sequence in which the second stage can be a time for the original groups to contrast their work with the rest of the groups, with the aim of acquiring new ideas and correcting mistakes in order to continue their work on a wider basis. If there is not much time, teachers can suggest that in the second step each group only discusses one group's results.



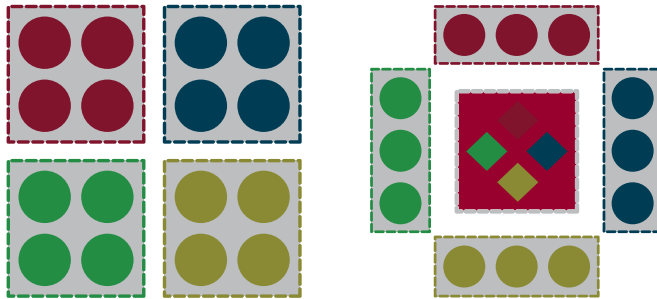
Snow ball

Another useful method for building a collective statement from different contributions consists in starting the sequence with an individual task, for example the answer to a question, then putting the participants into pairs to contrast their answers and make a single proposal. Following this, the facilitator forms groups by joining two pairs with the same goal, to agree on a single proposal, and then goes to form groups of eight members: Depending on the size of the big group you can stop whenever you think is suitable. At the end, the aim of this technique is to have one single proposal. As it is something done in steps, and you are promoting the attitude of listening and coming up to agreements from the very beginning, it usually avoids people feeling very attached to their "original" proposals and therefore avoids confrontations based on "my proposal is better just because is mine".



Fish Tank

Groups are organized and, through dialogue, reach a series of agreed positions. A representative is assigned in every group. The representatives of the groups are placed in the center to share the agreed positions and to try to come to final shared positions. Each group is placed behind its representative but cannot take part, unless his representative asks for "consultation". This should not be done very often.



Brainstorming

The moderator or chairperson asks the group to provide ideas about a topic **but to not analyze or discuss them at this stage**. All the ideas are written down on a board or a large piece of paper. The cognitive basis of brainstorming and a great part of creative thinking is the adjournment of judgment. It separates idea production from idea assessment. Adjourning judgment means postponing assessment until the final part of the technique.

Groups have a tendency to resist delaying judgment and they usually express their approval or opposition immediately. Whenever someone judges an idea in the middle of the brainstorming session, the facilitator or any other member of the group must remind that person to refrain from doing so until the session is over.

Characteristics and potential

- Brainstorming can be additive (sum of ideas) and multiplying (when others' ideas are used to provoke new ones)
- Because there are so many ideas, they belong to the group more than to the person who said them. The whole group feels they are part of the success.
- It is an efficient tool in diminishing the preponderance of interaction through systematic opposition.
- It facilitates participation effectively.
- It proves –in a very simple way- the superiority of groups over individuals in the production of lists of ideas, frames and focuses.

Limits and difficulties

- Production is fragmented and untidy.
- There are no previous agreements and production is non-hierarchical so it is difficult to “weigh” the resulting ideas.
- Neither the group nor the individual who put the idea forward strongly adhere to the idea.
- It is a very well-known technique but it is seldom used and it is often used incorrectly or not to its full potential.
- We often encounter resistance from members of the group when using this technique.
- Like many others, it is an instrumental technique. Its production is not conclusive with regards to the task at hand.

After the meeting

Once the time for the meeting is over, the work regarding the meeting continues. The information of what happened during the meeting has to be collected and shared with everyone to:

1. Help the group to have a common vision of what happened during the meeting (even when everybody agrees, is quite often that there are small different interpretations specially if the group is very big)
2. Allow the people who couldn't come to be aware of what happen and of the agreements that were taken during the meeting.

The most classical way of doing this is through writing minutes and giving some time for comments to those minutes (this is very useful when the meetings where dealing with very important topics and we really need a common vision of the agreements). Minutes usually pay attention only to general conclusions and agreements. As facilitators it is useful to read the agreements and conclusions after each block or each point of the meeting, to be sure that everybody understood the same, especially in controversial points. Debates are very difficult to be reproduced (we can find minutes that are trying to reproduce every intervention, but that is very difficult and it consumes a lot of time and energy. This should be done only if the group has the resources to do it, and the topics are very sensitive). In order to share not only the conclusions or agreements, but also the "atmosphere" or the impression of the debates, is good to invite those who didn't come to talk with those who did come (in the minutes we should write the people who attended the meeting).

After meetings, and as part of the group's care, we should pay attention to:

1. If there were important things not covered, make it explicit when they will be covered and follow up that they will be covered
2. Potential "uncomfortable" feelings: people who didn't express, or if the meeting was a hard meeting, people that didn't felt comfortable. This is related to the prevention of conflicts between meetings, and is part of the general conflict management dimension inside groups. Don't live "uncomfortable" situations to move from one meeting to the next one (unless is done on purpose because it is better to do so).

Tips for facilitators regarding meeting management

Tips for facilitators

Facilitators work regarding meetings start always before the meetings (pay attention to all the preparation work, and to the group atmosphere).

Facilitator's performance is not automatic; it will intervene when the group asks for it or when there are several people that want to talk.

If there are different facilitation roles (moderator, time keeper, taking notes) it is important to be coordinated, especially if there is a moment when recollecting, synthesizing or doing new proposals is needed.

Facilitating during a meeting is to be prepared for: ASKING, RECOLLECTING, SYNTHESYSING (when needed)

Therefore, from the start of the session, everyone must know who he/she is.

Has to manage that all issues the group wants to cover are covered in the correct timing. Therefore, he/she has to know, and let the group know, how much time there is for each debate.

When approaching the issues, he/she has to order them in such a way that we tackle them one by one and we close a subject before moving on to the next one.

Has to make efficiency, participation and cordial relations predominant.

Has to help everyone to express themselves, for example, inviting participants that have not yet spoken to give their opinion. In this sense, he/she will manage and respect the floor (although it is not a problem if someone intervenes in a precise moment).

Has to adapt the techniques to the tasks in order and to the group, in order to improve the work done. With time and experience, facilitators should be able to combine different techniques or to innovate with new ones.

Facilitator has to be sure that what happened during the meeting (specially the agreements and conclusions) are shared by all the members of the group, even with those who couldn't come to the meeting.

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About the Fursa project

In the context of the protracted Syrian refugee crisis, Search for Common Ground (Search) and its co-applicants, Coordinamento delle Organizzazioni per il servizio Volontario (COSV), the International Institute for Nonviolent Action (NOVACT) and Un Ponte Per... (UPP), started, in July 2016, an 18 months regional project, funded by the MADAD-Regional EU Trust Fund, titled **Fursa-Resilient communities: Supporting Livelihoods and Social Stability for Syrian refugee and host populations.**

The Fursa project targets Syrian refugee youth and host community youth (and IDPs in KRI) in three countries: Lebanon (Akkar and Bekaa), Turkey (Gaziantep, Hatay and potentially Kilis) and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (Erbil, Dohuk and Sulaymaniyah and refugee camps of Gawilan, Domiz and Arbhat).

This project addresses social cohesion between youth in host and refugee communities, using life skills, livelihood and psychosocial support (PSS) as tools and entry points for conflict stabilisation.

About the Human Rights Defenders in Action project

The project aims to enhance the capacities and coordination mechanisms of civil society organizations and public institutions (local and international) in Palestine on the accountability of human rights violations as well as broaden the impact and information on violations of human rights at the municipal, national and international levels. The methodology consists of the following components: 1) Training of HR Defenders, local authorities and civil society activists, 2) Legal support to HR Defenders and local authorities, 3) Strengthening of an observatory on human rights violations through collecting information and recording human rights violations in targeted populations, 4) Analysis and production of quarterly newsletters, formal complaints and viral alerts (political advocacy), 5) international advocacy through lectures, conferences and film forum.



International Institute
for Nonviolent Action

About the International Institute for Nonviolent Action – NOVACT

NOVACT-International Institute for Nonviolent Action promotes international peace-building actions in conflict situations. The Institute has been created through the collective effort of those active in international civil society to contribute to a peaceful, just and dignified world. Understanding nonviolence as a transformation strategy, NOVACT strives to achieve a society based on human security and real democracy, free of armed conflicts and violence in all of its dimensions. In cooperation with its international advisory committee and its network—composed of experts, human rights defenders and civil society organizations in the Middle East, North Africa, Europe and America—NOVACT supports non-violent movements which are working for social change and developing civilian peace intervention mechanisms to protect vulnerable groups in conflict situations.

As a committed, political, independent agency, NOVACT promotes peace initiatives, training programs and action-oriented research to advocate for national and international public policies and regulations that guarantee human security and the effective protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

With its headquarters in the Mediterranean city of Barcelona, NOVACT is registered as a non-governmental organization and is recognized by the United Nations.

www.novact.org

