

Creating Clarity in Conflict?

Integrating Organisational Development into the Peacebuilding World

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1 Introduction¹

“Peacebuilders are increasingly asking for more education in organisational leadership, as well as entrepreneurial skills to help sustain their work.”

Jim Smucker, Vice President Eastern Mennonite University

Organisations working in and on conflict face unique challenges. Do we know how to deal with them? This article argues that the conflict environment affects not only the structures of society and the individuals within it, but also the organisations that operate in these environments. It examines how Organisational Development (OD) can contribute to overcoming the challenges these organisations face.

The ‘conflict transformation’ discourse deals with challenges at both the individual and the societal or group level but does not provide answers to the question of how to deal with the organisational level. The ‘peacebuilding’ discourse, on the other hand, provides a framework for addressing organisational challenges, which can be summed up as ‘organisational capacity development’. However, when it comes to organisational aspects, the literature on peacebuilding voices some profound criticisms: that organisations working internationally in the field of peacebuilding are not taking into account local capacities or local needs, are incapable of learning, are bureaucratically structured and superimpose Western systems on societies and organisations in conflict (Autesserre 2014, Goetze 2017, Campbell 2018). Against this backdrop, it is not surprising that the tools created for organisational capacity development follow a linear understanding of development that is ill-suited to the complex nature of peacebuilding endeavours, demanding quantifiable outcomes that are measured against clearly defined goals and processes.

This criticism is as understandable as are the origins of these preferences: when looking at the domestic debates on foreign aid and development cooperation in Western countries, it becomes clear that the need for quantifiable outcomes is derived from the pressure on development ministries and agencies to justify the spending of taxpayers’ money. And yet the critics of peacebuilding cited above do have a point, as many systems of collaboration between international agencies and local peacebuilding organisations seem to lack sufficient effectiveness. Although this article does not attempt to analyse the shortcomings of peacebuilding collaboration systems, it does argue that OD is a useful conceptual supplement to conflict transformation and peacebuilding processes, for three reasons: 1) OD processes take into account the entire system and the interrelatedness of all stakeholders within it, paying attention to all their needs. 2) Organisational change processes, particularly in conflict environments, are complex² endeavours where the outcomes cannot be clearly defined beforehand, and the process of determining the goal is already part of achieving it. It therefore requires an approach to organisational challenges that allows for process orientation rather than measuring the performance of organisations against an objective yardstick. 3) OD is based on a value system that puts human beings rather than organisational efficiency at the centre of any change process.

After defining what kind of organisations are meant here (Section 2.1), this article examines the specific challenges of conflict organisations, focusing on one of the most intractable conflict environments: the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This background description is created using the author’s own field observations, on the one hand, and the ‘shrinking spaces’ discourse as a proto-theoretical background, on the other (a fully-fledged theory on this phenomenon is still lacking; Section 2.2). It then scrutinises the academic discourse on conflict transformation and peacebuilding for guidance on how to deal with these specific organisational challenges (Section 2.3 and 3). After this literature review, Organisational

¹ I would like to thank my colleague and friend Dr Yael Ben David for her contribution to this article.

² Dave Snowden’s development of the Cynefin framework was instrumental in defining the difference between decision-making contexts that are clear, complicated, complex and chaotic (Snowden/Boone 2007).

Development is introduced as an approach that offers a threefold response to the challenges presented, namely interrelatedness, process orientation and humanistic values (Section 3.1). It then asks what OD can contribute to addressing the challenges faced by conflict organisations (Section 3.2), and shares two ‘stories’ of consultation processes, one successful and one less so (Section 3.3), to see what preliminary learning points we can identify.

It concludes with a pledge for complexity: responding to organisational challenges, particularly in conflict environments, is a) a necessary part of any peacebuilding or conflict transformation endeavour; and b) a complex (not a complicated) endeavour requiring approaches that are less expert-driven and more process-oriented: agile, iterative, locally driven and/or executed at eye level, and allowing for emergence. This holds true for the individual and societal levels – and all the more so for the organisational level.

2 Setting the scene: Challenges and coping mechanisms of conflict organisations

2.1 What are ‘conflict organisations’?

The ‘organisation’ phenomenon is the subject of its own field of academic enquiry (*organisational studies*), and the question of how to define it has filled several volumes and would certainly exceed the scope of this article.³ In order to narrow down the subject of this article, I will combine what the literature offers with my own observations from the field.

It is possible to identify organisations working IN conflict, but not specifically ON conflict (Gibbons/Piquard 2006), although their activities nevertheless contribute to conflict transformation efforts without specifically being associated with that field. International peacebuilding organisations in the Middle East, for example, are increasingly partnering with civil society organisations that are not necessarily related to the ‘peace camp’ but nevertheless fit into its strategies; independent citizen journalism platforms are one example. These strategies are increasingly transcending the classical dialogue work of bringing groups from both sides of the conflict together. Instead, the partners work within their own society, aiming to change attitudes towards the Other.

Businesses, governmental actors and even the military can be relevant to conflict transformation or peacebuilding efforts, whether in a supporting or in an obstructing role. When it comes to civic engagement and the role of social actors, the literature distinguishes between non-state actors, non-governmental organisations and civil society organisations (Fischer 2011, 288). International actors play a role, as do local stakeholders. In this article, the focus is on local non-profit civil society actors that are engaged in conflict transformation actively (i.e. as part of their mandate) or passively (through partnering with international peacebuilding organisations). For sake of brevity, I will call them ‘conflict organisations’ throughout this article.

These ‘actors’ are by no means all ‘organisations’ in the conventional sense: we encounter well-established organisations with formal staff, hierarchies and regular funding, as well as loose gatherings of

³ A good first introduction to the subject of ‘organisations’ is available in German, authored by Stefan Kühl (2011).

	Organisations	Temporary cooperation	Permanent cooperation	Networks	Social movements
Membership	determined by contract	has to be established first; system boundaries can be described	contractually defined, fixed	fluid system boundaries	no criteria for membership
Purpose orientation or goal creation	purpose/goal set permanently	in the beginning often only clear 'on paper'; clarification of purpose happens as part of the process	goals contractually agreed upon	shared basic intention updated on occasion	creation of goal through popular purposes
Decision-making	(partly) hierarchical	often informal steering structures	formalised and sometimes heavily differentiated steering structure	often informal decision-making, ad hoc	speaker model; process of coordination

Table 1: Membership, Purpose orientation or goal creation and Decision-making for different types of actors

Source: Como Consult GmbH, Ellen Künzel & Christian Koch, based on work by Stefan Kühl and GIZ (2015, 10).

people who are united by the same cause, and who volunteer for this cause, while some may have paid staff as well. Other actors can be better described as movements that have grown an organisational structure. There are also loose networks of independent organisations that have managed to define their common denominator and have agreed to cooperate in one form or another.

Organisations are social systems. As such, they can be distinguished from other systems like ecosystems or technical systems. These social systems have three key features that allow us to describe their dissimilarities: membership, purpose orientation or goal creation, and decision-making. All three features vary according to the type of actor (see Table 1).

When working with these actors, it is helpful to create an awareness about these differences. In that sense, this table is less a descriptive or analytical tool than a curative tool, to be used for increasing conflict organisations' understanding of their own status, needs and challenges. It illustrates the multitude of types of conflict organisations and calls for approaches that are able to take these differences into account without resorting to ready-made, 'one-size-fits-all' solutions.

One of the binational Israeli-Palestinian peace 'organisations' I had the honour to work with was established in secret: Palestinian resistance fighters had heard about some Israeli soldiers refusing to serve in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, and were curious to meet them. It took several months and failed attempts before that clandestine meeting actually happened. Neither side wanted to be seen doing 'business' with the enemy, for fear of being seen as traitors. But out of these initial meetings, a steady group of individuals formed, motivated by seeing the other side just as weary of the bloodshed as themselves and fighting the real enemy – the cycle of hatred and violence. They started to initiate activities like joint demonstrations and in-house meetings and staged street theatre in order to attract others and involve them in the non-violent struggle against the occupation. The group grew larger and larger, and started to see itself as a movement. At the same time, it also attracted donations, as the founding idea was so appealing. They started professionalising themselves, and created an organisational structure with one Israeli and one Palestinian person on top (the position was called 'CEO') and a structure that resembled the rank structure of the military – not surprising given the origin of this 'organisation'. They started to employ professionals and pay salaries. They formed a steering group that took responsibility and made management decisions. These decisions were often contested among the volunteers 'on the ground' – after all, they were the ones doing the dirty work and not the ones in the management group. When I started working with them, I presented the grid above to them, not to pin them down into one category, but to

create a language for making their internal tensions describable. It fell on fertile ground and is currently being used in order to restructure the organisation.

2.2 Challenges of conflict organisations: The case of Israel and Palestine

The 1993/1995 Oslo Accords have helped produce a vibrant civil society scene on this contested land. These organisations are active in many fields: engaging for human rights, non-violent conflict transformation and dialogue, acting as watchdog organisations, providing valuable independent information about government performance, and supporting progressive media outlets, artists and many more.

The reality of these organisations in 2019 has little to do with the time when US President Bill Clinton brought together Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin on the lawn of the White House almost twenty-five years ago. While in the nineties this might have been seen as a welcome contribution to a pluralistic society, the spaces for these organisations' activities today are shrinking, and often they face significant obstacles to their work. Conflict organisations challenge the dominant interpretation of past and current events and their meaning for the collective identity, and insist on the fact that there are alternative viewpoints and interpretations. Societies in conflict sanction such deviations from the 'norm' in severe ways: from failing to acknowledge the work of conflict organisations as being important, to ignoring or side-lining them, labelling them as 'traitors', defunding them or excluding them from state resources, and subjecting them to personal threats or even violence. The table below provides an overview of trends that constrain civil society worldwide today, many of which can be observed in Israeli and Palestinian civil society as well.

Trends that Constrain Civil Society Today

1. **'Philanthropic protectionism'**, which encompasses a raft of government-imposed constraints on the ability of domestic civil society organisations (CSOs) to receive international funding (as seen most prominently in states such as India, Russia, Ethiopia and Egypt, but now found in dozens of national laws globally);
2. **Domestic laws** regulating the activities of non-profits more broadly (for example by imposing onerous registration, licensing, reporting and accounting obligations on NGOs and allowing states to have limitless discretion in sanctioning organisations for 'compliance' failures);
3. **Restrictions on freedom of assembly** and association (for example by banning demonstrations outright, using national security laws to restrict mobilisation, cracking down on unions or militarising police forces in the name of 'public order');
4. Criminalisation, stigmatisation and **de-legitimisation** of human rights defenders (HRDs) (a term that encompasses all actors engaged in non-violent advocacy for human rights and social justice) as well as the criminalisation of refugee solidarity;
5. The **restriction of freedom of expression** in general as well as online, directly through censorship and intimidation, and indirectly through 'mass surveillance';

6. **Intimidation and violent attacks** against civil society by religious conservatives, corporations, the far-right or non-state actors;
7. The **decreasing space for online activism** due to the repression and intimidation faced by activists, particularly women HRDs, (including being subject to blackmail, slander, online harassment and stalking and threats from both public/government-affiliated and private sources);
8. **Risk aversion** and securitisation on the part of public and private civil society donors resulting in the limiting or withdrawal of funding for grassroots activism and marginalised causes (such as Palestinian self-determination, counter-terrorism and human rights) in favour of larger, less politicised organisations and ‘safer’, less ‘controversial’ issues;
9. The **capture of spaces** traditionally inhabited by CSOs by private interest groups, lobbyists, GONGOs (government-oriented NGOs) and corporate social responsibility initiatives as well as attempts to discredit CSOs;
10. The **exclusion of civil society organisations from the banking system** under the guise of counterterrorism measures, which is a relatively new but escalating phenomenon in the discourse on ‘shrinking space’.

Source: Reprinted from: On “shrinking space”: A framing paper. Published by Transnational Institute. Amsterdam, April 2017.

Through these practices, which are increasingly used by government actors, businesses and far-right activists, people engaging in conflict transformation are subjected to intense stress on a personal and professional level. At the organisational level, this environment impacts on conflict organisations in numerous ways. The stress resulting from the ongoing conflict situation impacts their ability to plan for the long term as they tend to perceive the situation as urgent (Alon/Omer 2005). This neglect of internal planning lessens their impact and hinders their ability to engage in transforming conflicts, creating a vicious cycle of ineffectiveness. This cycle is exacerbated by the performance of some donor organisations and their emphasis on quantifiable outcomes on the project level rather than long-term sustainable change, and on activities rather than organisational (change) processes. The strategies described above, which lead to ‘shrinking spaces’ for civil society actors, also affect organisations’ access to resources, be they financial (donors), structural (access to the banking system) or intangible (volunteers are scared off). In addition, threats or actual physical attacks on members of civil society organisations can cause trauma, which can potentially affect their performance within the organisation and requires special attention. This takes away resources from activities that pursue the actual organisational purpose.

2.3 Maladaptive coping practices

Under these pressures, conflict organisations have developed working modes that help alleviate the immediate situation but are problematic in the long run for the existence of the organisation and for the cause they are fighting for. It should be noted that the following descriptions of phenomena is by no means complete; nor do all organisations fit those descriptions. Rather, they are meant to shed light on some phenomena that the author witnessed while working with conflict organisations.

Reactivity

Although conflict organisations fulfil an important societal role, many governments, especially those in protracted conflict environments, choose not to support their activities for political reasons; as a result, many conflict organisations are forced to plan their work around prospective donors' funding programmes. This can create conceptual ambiguities between the rationale behind the project proposal and the actual project reality. In addition, many organisations feel a need to respond to societal or political events, which makes them actors in a game shaped by others instead of allowing them to set their own agenda. From an organisational perspective, they are disconnected to their own *raison d'être* and core beliefs and act as 'service providers' for funding agencies that in turn are required to report back to their main donor. In order to meet their donors' expectations, many organisations produce a vision document or an organisational strategy that is highly ethical. However, they may not live up to their own standards, instead adopting internal behaviour that contradicts the values of their vision (for example, the principle of non-violence). This is by no means confined to conflict regions or to NGOs. The conflict environment and the importance of donors for the existence of NGOs nevertheless exacerbate this phenomenon. Another reason why they do not invest in long-term planning is the experience of constant destruction, which makes it hard for many actors to believe in long-term visions of change.

Overplanning

Some conflict organisations, on the other hand, have become experts in planning and somehow even manage to show progress to their donors. The impact of their activities, however, is often minimal compared to the effort that they put into planning. This behaviour can also be attributed to the conflict environment. To begin with, people do not like change. A significant change in the conflict dynamics might mean inconvenient changes in people's lives, including those who are working 'for peace'. In addition, especially in conflicts with asymmetric distribution of power, the high-power status group has a need to restore its moral image (Shnabel et al. 2009). It is therefore important for civil society actors from the high-power status group to engage in peace work and to show that they are 'on the good side'. However, for those professionally engaged in peace work, a profound change towards peace would mean not only abolishing the economic basis of their work but also abolishing the chance to restore their moral image. An engagement in thorough planning processes without tangible outcomes as a recurring organisational pattern might be the result of individual fears connected to that psychological barrier. Low-status groups, on the other hand, have different needs, centring around the issue of agency, in the sense of restoring one's perception of being able to shape one's environment. With regard to organisational planning, organisations from low-status groups therefore tend in the opposite direction: planning is seen as something negative as it diverts energy from the activity itself. In addition, low-status groups tend to face higher economic pressures and are therefore more focused on action rather than planning.

Utopian visions

In protracted conflicts in particular, everyone is 'pro-peace'. The visions of many conflict organisations revolve around this ideal, yet they are lofty, utopian and not suitable for planning practical projects. It has become difficult for them to imagine what this vision of peace should look like and what contribution their specific organisation can make to eventually achieving that vision. Instead, reference is made to philosophical ideas such as justice, freedom and equality – which are important values, but do not provide clear guidance for planning activities (Bar-Tal 2000). Research on trauma gives us another insight here: in order to successfully deal with trauma, one has to have the feeling of being secure, of being in control, and to be able to foresee what is coming. Entering an unknown sphere ('Peace!') which is not yet concrete might be subconsciously rejected. Therefore, staying on a more abstract, less defined level somehow inspires hope without the scary consequences of real change. Moreover, it allows continued reinforcement

of internal coping mechanisms such as externalisation and blaming others – in this case, blaming society, political opponents, those in power, etc.⁴

Siege mentality

Siege mentality is a collective state of mind in which a group of people believe themselves to be constantly attacked, oppressed or isolated in the face of the negative intentions of the rest of the world. Although a group phenomenon, the term describes the emotions and thoughts of the group as a whole and as individuals (Christie 2011, 997). This phenomenon can also be observed as a feature of the organisational culture of conflict organisations that have put themselves in opposition to the rest of their society. Although their work is directed towards the benefit of the society as a whole, some conflict organisations choose to work ‘below the radar’ to avoid societal pressure. While this secrecy may be important to provide safety for their members, civil society organisations also need to publicise their activities to some extent, whether for their own legitimacy or for their mobilising efforts. This dilemma can create intra-organisational pressures that result in conflicts, or it creates conflicts with donors that need some level of publicity for their work.

3 Conflict organisations and conflict transformation

How can we deal with these organisational challenges posed by the conflict environment? What can we learn from the literature on conflict transformation?⁵ Working on conflict creates psychological challenges on the individual and on the group or societal level that are well-known and researched. Bar-Tal (2007) summarises the adverse effects of intractable conflict such as threat, stress, pain, exhaustion, grief, trauma, misery, hardship and cost, both in human and material terms, and argues that this conflict environment evokes specific challenges: adapting to this environment means taking into account individuals’ needs for knowing, mastery, safety, positive identity and so on. If people are to function properly as individuals and members of society, their needs must be fulfilled (Bar-Tal 2007, 1434). Second, people need to cope with the adverse effects of intractable conflict, such as stress over extended periods of time, by developing appropriate mechanisms. Third, they need to develop a system of psychological conditions such as loyalty to a society and country, high motivation to contribute, persistence, readiness for personal sacrifice, unity, solidarity, adherence to society’s goals, determination, courage and endurance (ibid.).

On the group or society level, these individual needs produce social mechanisms that ensure the ability of individuals to function under the conditions of conflict and its described effects. These mechanisms are best described and summarised in the “integrative approach” developed by Bar-Tal and Halperin (2011), including conflict-supporting beliefs, general worldviews and freezing factors such as the “threatening context that entails mechanisms such as control of mass media, censorship on information, delegitimisation of alternative information and its sources, punishment, the closure of archives and encouragement and rewarding mechanisms” (Bar-Tal/Halperin 2011, 225-227). In addition, individuals

⁴ I would like to thank my colleague Miriam Modalal for her contribution to this paragraph.

⁵ When using the term ‘conflict transformation’, we are referring to the ‘Berghof’ definition: “A generic, comprehensive term referring to actions and processes that seek to alter the various characteristics and manifestations of violent conflict by addressing the root causes of a particular conflict over the long term. It aims to transform negative destructive conflict into positive constructive conflict and deals with structural, behavioural and attitudinal aspects of conflict. The term refers to both the process and the completion of the process. As such, it incorporates the activities of processes such as conflict prevention and conflict resolution and goes farther than conflict settlement or conflict management” (Miall 2004).

and groups tend to perceive Self and Other in monolithic terms, which hinders their ability to identify complexity and multi-voices in the social and political field (Ben David/Rubel-Lifschitz, 2018).

It is striking that ever since conflict transformation emerged as a distinct discipline in the early 1990s (Kriesberg 2011, 50), the focus has been on working with individuals, groups of individuals or societies as a whole, but not organisations. Conceptually, efforts were made to carve out conflict transformation as an approach that moves beyond conflict prevention, management or resolution (ibid.). There is, however, little to no literature, neither academic nor from ‘the field’ (manuals, concept papers, tools, etc.), that deals with the specific organisational challenges of conflict organisations.

One notable exception is the insightful elaboration by Glasl and Ballreich (2004) that examines the impact internal conflicts have on the teamwork of conflict organisations; however, it does not address the impact social reality has on their work.

UNDP Ukraine has made the noteworthy effort to document their organisational change processes (UNDP 2017). This publication sheds light on many different methods, but the conflict environment as a determining factor for organisational challenges is not addressed. Moreover, the publication is striking as it presents methods with diverse theoretical backgrounds: the Organisational Capacity Assessment (OCA) (Pact 2012), for example, focuses on analysing the organisational problem and can be defined as a quantitative method. The *Appreciate Inquiry* method, on the other hand, is a participatory, qualitative method that seeks to value ‘what is’ and encourages participants to imagine ‘what should be’.

3.1 Organisational challenges in the peacebuilding discourse

The original definition of peacebuilding (Galtung 1976) does not specify the actors involved. In his famous ‘Agenda for Peace’, former UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali mentioned ‘institution reform’ as one of the measures that post-conflict peacebuilding can use (United Nations 1995, 12). Without going into the pitfalls of attempting to define peacebuilding, it nevertheless appears to be a set of processes that involves international actors (UN agencies, national ministries from foreign countries, international NGOs), on the one hand, and local actors (national ministries, civil society), on the other. From a systemic perspective, it seems that this collaboration model has not yet unlocked its full potential. International peacebuilding actors have been criticised for not taking into account local capacities or local needs; for not learning and adapting to local needs; and for being bureaucratically structured, which leads them to reproduce themselves, with the result, in the case of peacebuilding, that Western structures are superimposed on societies and conflict organisations.

Susanna Campbell (2018, 101), for example, points out several factors that prevent international peacebuilding organisations from effectively addressing these organisational challenges: ‘one-size-fits-all’ approaches, bureaucratic routines and an accountability system that reports to the donor rather than to the community, to name but a few. It is these factors, she argues, that prevent peacebuilding organisations from engaging in ‘organisational learning’ and adapting the programmes to the needs of the local and national actors. Catherine Goetze (2017) adds that “organisational contradictions (...) form serious stumbling blocks to peacebuilding” (Goetze 2017, 3). She finds that the literature on peacebuilding “by and large accepts (a) that peacebuilding is, indeed, legitimate to build peace in foreign lands, and (b) that its failure to do so is due to some form of technical or organisational dysfunction that can be fixed by some twists and tweaks” (ibid., 4). Mac Ginty and Richmond have argued for a “local turn”, pointing to the relationship between local actors and peacebuilders (Coning 2013, Mac Ginty and Richmond 2013). Séverine Autesserre (2014) even coined a term for the detachment of international peacebuilders and local stakeholders: in her book ‘Peaceland’, she argues convincingly that peacebuilders live in their own world, and that “the expatriates’ deficient understanding of local contexts prompts them to employ ready-to-use

templates of conflict resolution, even when these universal models are ill-suited to local conditions. [...] Their search for neutrality and their obsession with quantifiable outcomes also orient their efforts toward certain strategies and away from others that are just as necessary” (Autesserre 2014, 13). International Alert, together with other institutions, began as early as 2004 to lobby for a structured approach to address the organisational capacities of local actors in peacebuilding endeavours (Lange 2004). In short, it appears that the relationship between international peacebuilders and local actors deserves further attention when dealing with organisational challenges of conflict organisations.

These challenges are usually addressed in terms of ‘capacity development’. A core concept in development cooperation, capacity development is usually defined as taking place on the individual, the ‘enabling environment’ level – and on the organisational level (UNDP 1998). In order to better define the organisational aspects of capacity development, many donors and international agencies have devised tools for assessing the organisational capacity of their (potential) partners.⁶ These tools are, however, mostly inspired by what Autesserre (2014) calls their ‘obsession with quantifiable outcomes’, thus limiting the chances to establish an eye-level relationship between the consultant and the client organisation. The following section shows in more detail the differences in mindsets between OD and commonly used organisational capacity assessment methods.

3.2 The mindset of Organisational Development and why it fits the work with conflict organisations

In the late twenties and early thirties, an experiment changed the world: organisational theorist and psychologist Elton Mayo conducted a series of investigations known as the Hawthorne studies. Mayo allegedly found that changes in the working environment (specifically, the lighting situation in the factory) had an effect on workers’ productivity. While it later turned out that the results of this study could not be verified (it was found that the increase in productivity was a result of the attention being given to the workers, and not the actual change in the lighting situation), it nevertheless gave rise to the ‘human relations’ movement, refuting the Taylorist assumption of workers as interchangeable parts in an organisation. The academic dispute between humanist Elton Mayo and the proponent of organisational efficiency, Frederick Winslow Taylor, can be seen as the birthplace of Organisational Development, both as an academic field of study and as an approach for working with organisations.

Organisation Development is a systemwide application and transfer of behavioral science knowledge to the planned development, improvement, and reinforcement of the strategies, structures, and processes that lead to organisation effectiveness (Cummings/Worley 2008: 1).

In this section, I will argue why this approach is suitable for dealing with the challenges of conflict organisations that have been described in the previous section.

These challenges, as previously shown, can be found on numerous levels: on the **value level**, they promote a worldview of pluralism, coexistence, tolerance, connectedness. The organisational culture resulting from this worldview generally contrasts significantly with those worldviews to be found in competitive organisations, or in organisations that are hierarchically structured. Organisational Development fits well into this value system of conflict organisations: it aspires to create “opportunities for people to function as human beings rather than as resources in the productive process” (Margulies/Raia 1972, 3).

⁶ The Informing Change project has produced an extensive database of organisational capacity assessment tools for the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, which can be accessed under <https://hewlett.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/A-Guide-to-Using-OCA-Tools.pdf> (last accessed 04/08/2020).

The second reason why the mindset of OD fits well with conflict organisations relates to the **complexity of the environment**: rather than linear supply chains and professionals operating in a formal working environment with formal contracts, we are dealing with an intricate web of relationships between diverse stakeholders, who are connected to each other in enmity, friendship, mutual dependency, family relations, old feuds, favours exchanged (or not), vanities, reporting needs, financial needs, etc. Members of conflict organisations are part of the society they are trying to change. They are also part of a family system that they generally cannot change and that might be opposed to the work that they are doing. This interrelatedness against the backdrop of the conflict environment creates special challenges and has to be taken into account when tackling organisational challenges. The theoretical foundations of Organisational Development provide the appropriate language for dealing with this interrelatedness of individual, organisation and its environment (cf. Figure 1): Kurt Lewin's Field Theory (1939), for example, lays the groundwork for the understanding that the individual is closely interrelated with the environment s/he is operating in. Systems theory (Bertalanffy 1968) and Gestalt theory (Perls 1942), both important for describing phenomena on the organisational level, acknowledge this interrelatedness. [*Editor's note: On systems thinking and peacebuilding, see also Körppen et al. 2011.*]

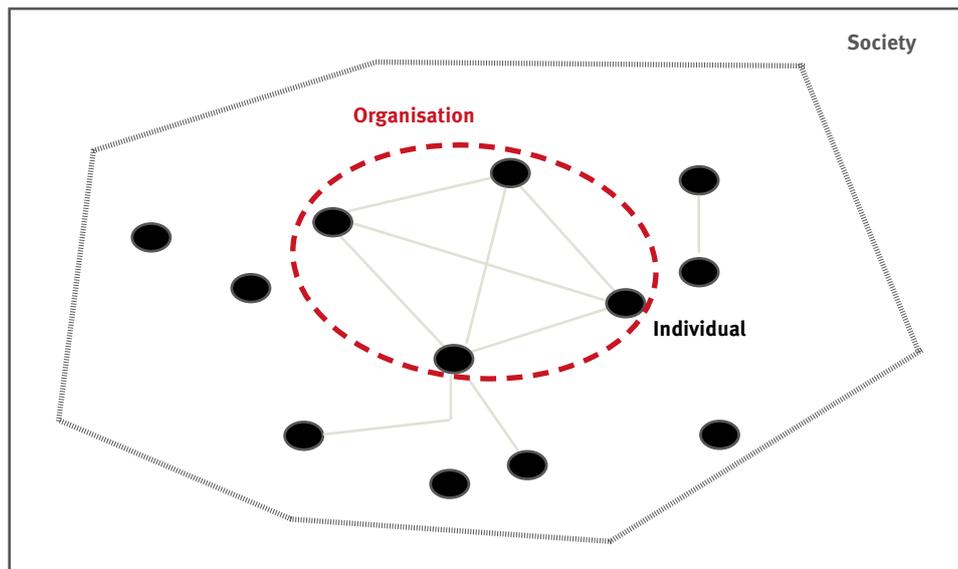


Figure 1: The relation between Individual, Organisation and Society

Looking at the **purpose of conflict organisations** (usually focusing on some sort of behavioural or attitude change), we also find a high level of complexity: the definition of success of an organisation, or even of an operation within the organisation, or an outcome of a process is less clear than in formal organisations. This is another good reason why Organisational Development is a good fit for conflict organisations: OD practitioners usually do not give expert advice on how to fix things. Ed Schein (2010), Professor Emeritus at the MIT Sloan School of Management and one of the most experienced and influential figures in Organisational Development, summarised it as follows (Schein 2010, 19):

“Process consultation is the key philosophical foundation for organisational learning and Organisational Development, for most activities that the consultant is doing while helping an organisation can be traced back to one basic assumption: One can only help a human system help itself. The consultant never knows enough about the given situation or culture of an organisation in order to recommend specific measures for solving its problems.”

While expert consultation ('telling and selling') is important in certain circumstances (if working as a tax advisor, lawyer, IT consultant, etc.), its success depends on a number of conditions (ibid., 26):

1. The manager has adequately defined her/his own needs;
2. S/he has been able to communicate these needs to the consultant;
3. S/he has adequately assessed whether the consultant is able to provide the information or service that is needed;
4. S/he is aware of the consequences of the decision to have a consultant gather this information or to initiate the change which the gathered information suggests or which is recommended by the consultant;
5. There is an external reality which can be studied in an objective way and which can be translated into knowledge that is helpful for the client.

Only if all of these conditions are met will the consultant be able to provide expert advice successfully. Process consultation, in contrast, focuses on the relationship between consultant and client. The diagnosis is done in a mutual and collaborative process. The consultant supports the client in developing a diagnosis for her/his own organisation and in developing an action plan based on that diagnosis. One of the consultant's tasks is to identify diagnostic and problem-solving tools but s/he should not attempt to solve the problems her-/himself unless s/he has the necessary information and experience to do so (ibid., 28).

This brief examination of these aspects – values, environment, purpose – indicates that OD as a humanistic approach might be a suitable response to the criticism that peacebuilding is donor-centric, incapable of organisational learning and ignoring the needs of local actors.

3.3 Focusing on organisational needs

The previous two sections shed light on the internal situation of conflict organisations and argued why Organisational Development is a suitable approach for dealing with the challenges they face. Let us now imagine having an ideal donor at hand: one with deep insights into the situation of its grantees and the will to support them beyond activity funding. How could this ideal donor respond to the challenges posed by the conflict and by shrinking spaces, by using the Organisational Development approach?

First of all, there cannot be a general answer to this question. The reason for this is to be found in the very nature of OD: it does not pretend to have ready-made, one-size-fits-all solutions. Client and consultant engage in a joint process to figure out what the issue is and what needs to happen. The solution lies with the client, not the consultant. Based on the description of the organisational challenges in Section 2.1, the following section nevertheless provides some initial ideas of what can be done. Rather than being prescriptive, it is intended to serve as a general illustration of what an OD process might look like.

Strengthening resilience

Shrinking spaces are attempts by various stakeholders to limit the freedom of movement and action of organisations that do not fit into their ideological worldview. These attempts not only create restrictions in what these organisations can actually do; they also have an effect on the people who work in these organisations and make the decisions. External facilitation and consultation can make a difference here: first of all, by strengthening resilience. As has been shown in Section 2.2, conflict has profound impacts

at the individual level. Whether the individual is able to deal with these hardships depends on her or his ability to “absorb disturbance and re-organise while undergoing change so as to still retain essentially the same function, structure, identity, and feedbacks” – as one commonly accepted definition of resilience goes (Walker et al. 2004, no page numbering).

The important aspect of resilience here is that it can be developed through training, and psychologists have devised highly effective training programmes for individuals. Although resilience is strengthened at the individual level, it is the organisation these individuals are members of that can provide the framework for it. This applies particularly in societies where talking openly about psychological issues is taboo: here, it may be important to address this issue as an aspect of organisational culture, thus enabling the individual member to benefit from these measures without having to expose their own vulnerabilities. While external OD consultants can suggest this measure if appropriate, it is also within the scope of the organisations themselves to exercise a duty of care towards their members, be they volunteers or formal employees, by organising resilience programmes.

Beyond this psychological response, two other approaches are worth mentioning with regard to strengthening resilience through OD processes: firstly, the solution-focused approach (de Shazer et al. 2007) is well-suited to assist people in conflict organisations to withstand attempts to limit their freedom of mind: focusing the conversation not on the difficulties, but on the exceptions that did work in the past, on the resources that are still available, and on the things that are currently possible and are working well. This is a simple but effective way to strengthen resilience and ‘unlearn’ unhelpful patterns that limit the mind.

Here, the outside observer can also help to open thinking spaces, to facilitate a process of out-of-the-box thinking, of ‘unlearning’ and of experimenting. *Human-Centred Design* (HCD), for example, is based on two suppositions: first, it assumes that all problems, even the seemingly intractable ones like poverty, gender equality and clean water, are solvable. Second, it assumes that the people who face these problems every day are the ones who hold the key to their solution (IDEO.org 2015, 9). This method is also simple and effective: instead of embarking on tedious planning processes, HCD starts, in consultation with the beneficiaries, by defining a need, generating ideas, producing several prototypes, and refining them in iterative loops. This powerful approach can help guide the facilitator and the affected organisations to find creative ways to respond to actions by governments, far-right activists or businesses that are intended to limit their freedom of action. This can also be a great cure for ‘overplanning’.

Conducting organisational capacity assessments

Assessing the organisational capacity of (potential) grantees is usually the first step in the relationship between donor and recipient. Quantitative assessment tools, such as OCA, are often used in order to rapidly determine whether there is a match. This allows for measurability and comparability and gives donors the possibility to justify the choice of grantee to their funding providers, whether it be the board of a foundation or the taxpayer in the case of ministries. Unfortunately, this approach forces local organisations into a framework that is determined by Western-style economic thinking (Zamfir 2017, 5) or, in other words, into the Taylorist mindset of organisational efficiency.

Donors also have an interest in effective programme implementation. However, this is impeded by the particular organisational challenges faced by conflict organisations, as described in Section 3. A programme to address these challenges would greatly enhance this effectiveness. It would focus attention on the relationship between client and consultant with the goal of developing a common language to describe the organisational needs. This opens the space for a change process where all the members of the organisation can be intrinsically motivated to implement that change.

Reducing donor dependency by developing earned income strategies

In the previous sections, I suggested that some organisations develop the maladaptive coping practice of reactivity in order to adjust to the conflict environment. This practice puts organisations in a situation

of donor dependency. Developing a sound financial strategy and diversifying sources of income may be an appropriate antidote to this practice. The development of ‘earned income’ strategies can be helpful in this regard. For non-profits, earned income can be generated from mission-related sales or from services provided. This form of income is particularly attractive to non-profits as their main source of income – grants – is generally tied to a specific project activity and therefore does not cover the core costs of running an organisation. The income generated by earned income strategies, in contrast, allows organisations to create revenue streams out of activities that are in line with their vision, or which utilise capacities identified among members or affiliates. It can be a powerful way of reducing donor dependency, thus allowing the organisation to plan independently of donor funding criteria. While some taxation aspects have to be kept in mind – non-profits can only declare a certain percentage of earned income tax-free – the trend to capture revenues from earned income activities is growing among successful non-profits.⁷

4 OD Processes with conflict organisations: Two case studies

Case study one: Utopian vision

I met the Israeli co-director of a Palestinian-Israeli peace organisation that had been around for many years as part of the management team of an EU-funded project that I had worked with as a consultant. At one of our meetings, he expressed interest in an organisational consultation process. In a separate meeting, his Palestinian counterpart supported the idea. In the first contracting session (whose purpose was to define the ‘contract’ or the framework for our cooperation), both expressed their desire to work on the vision for the organisation. They also mentioned that they were in a difficult situation, as the Palestinian co-director was about to leave. They nevertheless decided to commit to this process, so we started work.

At the start, I shared with them my observations about the current vision:

“A just and sustainable resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict based on a two-state framework, guaranteeing both peoples freedom, self-determination and dignity.”

This vision reflected very clearly where this organisation stood politically – a clear commitment to the two-state solution, speaking about two peoples, and referring to the values that are the usual point of reference for Western human rights discourses: justice, freedom, dignity. It did not say anything about where the organisation wanted to go. This is a frequent discussion among peace organisations: should they refer to these political issues in the vision because of the political nature of the context they are working in? Some say it is important to take a stand, so that others know what they want. Others say this might help to pin down the political standpoint.

From an OD perspective, this vision is interesting. It refers to the political context and content and describes the world as it should be, but does not mention the organisation. In *Gestalt* terms, the organisation is *deflecting* the contact with its environment and directing all activities towards changing the environment it operates in, without properly reflecting on what part the organisation itself is playing in the change process.

⁷ Forbes Nonprofit Council 2019, 12 Nonprofit Trends We’re Likely To See In 2020, According To Experts, retrieved at <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesnonprofitcouncil/2019/10/22/12-nonprofit-trends-were-likely-to-see-in-2020-according-to-experts/#718d205272af> (last accessed 30/07/2020).

With this specific organisation, it soon became clear that this vision did not capture what the organisation was actually doing, and besides the shared goal of ‘raising as much funding as possible’, there was not a lot of common ground between the two directors regarding its overall direction. Since there were also other differences between the Israeli and the Palestinian co-directors that led to frequent conflicts, we decided to engage in re-writing the vision. While working on the vision itself, we were simultaneously working on their communication as part of their organisational behaviour. Working with the ‘solution-focused approach’, we were able to identify several elements of constructive communication, which were then distilled into working principles and integrated into their daily lives. This improved the organisation’s performance and provided the co-directors with a sense of ‘quick wins’ – important in any change process. The subsequent work on the vision focused on highlighting the uniqueness of this organisation in the ‘market’ in which it operated: beyond affirming that they advocate ‘for peace, justice and equality’ (which was found to be important for the organisational culture), the co-directors now state that they ‘believe in partnerships’ and that the organisation is creating these partnerships in innovative ways. This is a bold step at a time when cooperation between Israelis and Palestinians is strongly discouraged and labelled as ‘treason’ or ‘normalisation’ of the occupation of the Palestinian territories. At the same time, this defines their uniqueness. This carving out of their core identity was done by them, and by them alone: after some time, we were able to move beyond the idea that the consultant was ‘the expert’ and ‘knows’ what needs to happen (at some point, one of them suggested that I write the vision for them and they comment on it) and we engaged in a meaningful conversation about what this organisation is about. Interestingly, it appeared to be completely clear to the Israeli co-director, whereas his Palestinian counterpart asked questions which eventually brought important differences to light. We were then able to address these differences and get to the core purpose of their shared organisation.

It is interesting to note that this work was meaningful to them on two different levels: the new vision led to the subsequent clarification of what that means in terms of structure and personnel requirements. After the vision overhaul was completed, determining the organisational structure and writing the job description for vacant posts was much faster. Beyond the content level, this process also led to results on the communication level: engaging in a facilitated discussion on what this organisation is all about made them understand their viewpoints better and led to more motivation on both sides, and the Palestinian co-director remained part of the organisation for much longer than planned.

This experience is a good example of the systemic approach as it brought to light the different levels involved: organisational (discussing and amending the vision), interpersonal (reflecting on communication patterns and identifying helpful patterns to strengthen the co-directors’ internal communication) and societal, with the Palestinian director explaining the pressures she felt as a Palestinian and as a member of an organisation that is allegedly guilty of normalising the occupation because of its binational character.

Case study two: Creating an organisational strategy - overplanning

Another consultation process focused, at the request of the client (an Israeli peace organisation), on the development of a strategy to establish a college for conflict transformation. Through solution-focused questions, we identified the considerable resources they had available as well as specific steps they would like to take. In the second meeting, I outlined several ways to go about it, based on the results of the first meeting. To my surprise, they rejected all of them, maintaining that they needed to first understand what they actually wanted to do.

I was confused, so in the third meeting I decided to help them decide what they wanted, and gave them three options on how to proceed: analysing the structure of the organisation as their main resource, developing a plan for the first steps they identified in the first meeting, or undertaking a demand analysis in order to better understand the field they operate in. Again, their response was: we first need to understand WHAT we actually want to do. I was even more puzzled. For me, it was clear from the first meeting that what they wanted was a strategy for creating a college for conflict transformation practitioners. For them, it was clear that they first wanted to discuss how to create a profession of conflict transformation practitioners,

with the college being one possibility. I then prepared a ‘vision quiz’, where I asked them several solution-oriented questions about the purpose of the organisation, which they found extremely helpful. After several months of silence, they got back to me and requested another meeting. They told me that they were now much clearer on what they wanted and came up with two goals: a) creating a college and b) creating a coalition of conflict transformation practitioners. When I mentioned that both were extremely ambitious projects, the director of the organisation opted for the college. In other words, we took a long detour in order to arrive back where we were in the beginning. The most important insights from this detour, including other information I had from this organisation, were: 1) there is a tension between planning and action in this organisation; 2) for them, planning means getting the full picture before deciding on an action.

One might argue that major ambitions need major planning. And creating a college for conflict transformation is indeed an ambitious endeavour. After sharing my observations with them, we continued to work on the strategy, using the *Business Model Canvas* (Osterwalder et al. 2010), which brought interesting insights and was seen as helpful. We then defined the next steps, one of which was to work on the ‘brand’ in order to be better able to approach other professionals, donors or the general public. The meeting with a branding expert, however, triggered considerable resistance, and it was decided not to pursue the branding option, with the argument that it might be too early in the process. It slowly became clear to me that this resistance was a recurring pattern. My suggestions to plan something small, test it, evaluate it, re-plan it and thus ‘get into gear’, was repeatedly met with the remark “but first we need to know about our strategic direction”. Five months into the process, I realised that we might be dealing with a maladaptive coping practice of over-planning. Yet my suggestions for specific steps were still rejected.

What can we learn from this experience? This case study shows how OD processes are determined by the client and not the consultant. While this client might be operating under a maladaptive practice, the consultant has few means to ‘push through’ his or her agenda, or even to hand to the patient the medicine s/he ‘knows’ is best for the patient (OD as process consultation rather than the expert approach). The consultant’s task is to a) suggest steps that s/he deems useful and at the same time b) make the client system understand the process. This is best described as a dance with the client, where sometimes the consultant takes the lead and sometimes the client takes the next step, but at all times both are attentive to each other in order to be able to follow.

With conflict organisations like this one, the consultant needs to zoom out from time to time in order to be able to realise at which point this dance is going into a repetition of unhelpful patterns. Once the consultant realises this pattern (which can take the form of complex thought structures during a meeting, resistance against making practical steps in the real world, or simply delaying/not scheduling meetings), the consultant then takes up the lead again and draws the client’s awareness to the pattern. However, it is up to the client to decide what to do with this observation.

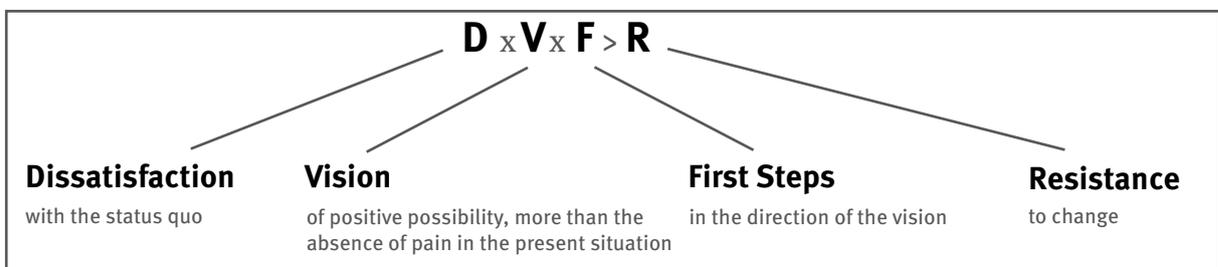


Figure 2: Dissatisfaction, Vision, First Steps and Resistance within organisations

The third lesson to be learned from this case study refers to the principle of interrelatedness. When I started working with this organisation one of my first intuitions was that while they were extremely well-connected with other peace organisations, even worldwide, it was not clear to me how they were connected

to their own society. This first impression became more evident throughout the work and eventually turned out to be an obstacle for their Organisational Development. In Gestalt terms, phenomena like these have been described as retroflection – instead of actively shaping the contact with the environment, the Self (here: the organisation) is mostly dealing with itself and is creating a strong boundary against the outside environment, resulting in a contact interruption and rendering meaningful interaction impossible.

This case study is a vivid example of the limits of Organisational Development. If the resistance to change outweighs the dissatisfaction with the current situation, the consultant from the outside can only share observations, and eventually end the consultation, which is what happened in this case. At the same time, resistance is an important source of information for OD-practitioners. The *Beckhard-Harris Change Model* can serve as an easy-to-use litmus test during any organisational change process (Beckhard/Harris 1987). This formula implies that all three elements on the left side (see Figure 2), Dissatisfaction, Vision and First Steps, must be present for change to occur. If any element is missing, the product is zero, which will always be less than the Resistance to change, which is always present to some degree.

5 Conclusion

Organisational Development can be a useful conceptual element of peacebuilding or conflict transformation processes. It can help mitigate the unique challenges faced by conflict organisations because of its systemic view, acknowledging the interrelatedness of stakeholders; because of its process orientation and its ability to deal with complexity, without recourse to expert approaches; and because of its focus on the human beings in the organisation rather than on organisational efficiency alone.

Looking at the organisational level of conflict transformation or peacebuilding helps distinguish between different types of entities – from established organisations to loose networks and social movements. All these types are affected by the challenges of the conflict environment in different ways, endangering the effectiveness of peacebuilding or conflict transformation endeavours. This article showed how shrinking spaces strategies used by far-right activists, conservative religious, businesses and government players (including state and non-state armed forces) in conflict settings pose organisational challenges that are different from those faced by individuals or societies. It also identified the maladaptive coping practices used in response to these challenges, and how they help alleviate the immediate pressure but are problematic for the organisation's stability in the long run, and thus for the sustainability of peacebuilding efforts. Some initial ideas were put forward to show how OD can respond to these challenges, and how two OD processes led to organisational change in one case, and to resistance in the other. These case studies were used to illustrate the importance of a healthy contact between the conflict organisation and the society in which it operates, how the process is determined by the client and not the consultant, and how to deal with resistance once it occurs.

Conflict transformation and peacebuilding projects should not only focus on the individual or the societal level but should integrate the organisational level into their work. Conflict organisations are particularly challenged as they put themselves in opposition to the dominant narrative that focuses on exclusion and feeds the conflict cycle with stereotypes about the adversary group. The work of conflict organisations is characterised by complexity, where its outcome cannot be known. With its process orientation, OD can integrate the perspective of these local peacebuilding or conflict transformation collaboration systems and increase their effectiveness. Peacebuilding and conflict transformation need fewer experts and more focus on the internal challenges of conflict organisations.

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