The Training Process:

Achieving social impact by training individuals?

How to make sure that training *for* conflict transformation has an impact *on* conflict transformation

Dirk Sprenger

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1. Introduction

Recently I read that an international organisation had facilitated, within one year, 15 training courses for conflict transformation. Three hundred individuals underwent capacity-building on this subject. The organisation's goals were surpassed. Unfortunately, I could not find any information about the impact. I was left with numbers and the organisation's statement of fulfilled goals. I would have liked to read instead why the instrument of training was chosen. And what some of these 300 people did with what they learned during the training courses. And how this had an influence on the conflict situations they live in or work on – and what kind of impact.

Why do I want to know this? Because training is not an end but a means. Students do not go to school because it is nice and they learn a lot. We send our children to school because they acquire knowledge and skills for life, and because it represents an important contribution to the forming of their personalities. Students do not go to school and then, afterwards, life starts. They go while life is going on. Just along the same lines, training for conflict transformation is not something external, something outside of the conflict, even if the laboratory conditions sometimes give this impression – here we are in the training course, afterwards we go back to the conflict situation. Training is a part of conflict transformation or, in other words, training is an intervention in conflict. And if an intervention in conflict takes place, it is important to take into consideration the questions of effectiveness and impacts.

More and more international donors finance capacity-building by training for conflict transformation. More and more agencies offer courses. More people in conflict situations request training as well, at least in my experience. Capacity-building agencies even commission expert studies on the need for training in conflict transformation. In one sentence: There is an impressive amount of training work going on with relation to conflict.

This is a further reason why I am interested in exploring the instrument of training within the world of conflict and conflict transformation. A lot of resources – time, energy, money – are spent. With the limited resources there are, is it always the right decision and right approach to go for training work? In order to be able to answer this question with a resounding "yes", we need to know that this work has a positive, conflict-transforming effect on the conflict.

"Conflict transformation" here is used in a broad sense. It is about changing situations from destructive or violent conflict to working on conflict with non-violent means. With this approach, needs and differences have to become open and clear. The parties involved work out if they can respect each other's needs and resolve differences, or if they can find ways that all sides involved can live with the differences. Conflict transformation in this sense is at least twofold: it is about changes in the outside world but also about changes within the individual.

"Impact" here means a certain change or effect in a conflict context, caused by an activity or bundle of activities. And "positive impact" or "conflict-transforming impact" refers to an activity

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that results in a contribution to conflict transformation as defined above.[1]

The guiding questions for this article are therefore, "How to make training in conflict transformation more efficient and more effective" and "How to make sure that training *for* conflict transformation has an impact *on* conflict transformation".

In the following section of the article, I clarify my own training "philosophy". The main body of the article is dedicated to distilling conclusions, "lessons learned" if you wish, from my experience as a trainer for conflict management, crisis prevention and stress management, mainly in the context of development cooperation with a strong regional focus on Latin America. I look, in turn, at analysis and strategy development that need to accompany training events, at participants' characteristics and their effects on training, at trainers' profiles, at contents and formats, at the process in which trainings need to be embedded, and at possible negative impacts. I end each of the subsections dealing with these issues by presenting a very short list of questions that a trainer (or trainee) should ask him-/herself when faced with decisions about designing (or signing up for) training for conflict transformation.

2. The notion of training in the context of conflict

A first step in making sure that training for conflict transformation has an impact is to work out a sound understanding of the notion of training in the context of conflict situations.

2.1 "Training" refers to a process

When I facilitated a training workshop for conflict transformation in Central America, one participant asked me during a coffee break about the planned follow-up and about next steps. I told her that the organisation responsible for the course had, as far as I knew, not planned any follow-up so far. I explored what her expectations were and why she had asked. I still remember her answer: "In the training laboratory I understand things and can apply instruments. But the real questions always come to my mind after the training course has finished. And I face real problems and challenges when I am back in my context and try to apply the training results. I already know, for example, that my boss won't change any structure in our organisation if he sees or fears a threat to the power he has over us." Our conversation ended by her saying, "Otro flor de un día" – another flash in the pan.

For me, this was not a surprising answer. From other experiences, I knew that as soon as participants are back in their realities, few or no training results are transferred from the laboratory to the real-life context. If there is any transfer, it happens on an individual level but not on a social level. After this particular training event it became once more obvious to me that with "training" we really should not just refer to an event, but to a process.

If we use "training" in the sense of a one-off event or course, then the switches – starting on the level of language – are thrown in the wrong direction, and certainly not towards conflict-transforming impacts. It is as if we use the notion "negotiation" only in the limited sense of "bargaining for positions". Bargaining for positions alone, though, does not bring us to win-win solutions, to understanding interests and to results that also pay attention to, and possibly improve,

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[1] The terminology associated with the Peace and Conflict Impact Assessment literature further differentiates between results, effects, outcomes and impacts, which for the purpose of this article does not seem necessary. See, for example, Paffenholz 2005.

relationships. If we negotiate as positional bargainers we leave "value on the table", i.e. we fail to make full use of the potential of our negotiation encounter (Fisher and Ury 1981). Likewise, referring with "training" basically to training events or training courses cuts off the perspective that by training a positive, conflict-transforming impact can be reached *over time*.

2.2 "Training" means exercise and reflection

Imagine you like Klezmer music a lot and you want to learn to play the clarinet. A friend tells you about a good course. You subscribe. Entering the classroom, you are surprised because you see a screen and a beamer and, for sure, the other four participants. But you are missing the instruments (since the advertisement said everything will be provided by the organisers). You think: "Well, maybe this will be the introductory session and next week we start with the real action." But session after session there are slide presentations and discussions: the way you handle the clarinet, everything about the mouthpiece and lipping, about notes and finger positions, and so on. For sure, you can ask questions and a lot of discussions go on. Meanwhile at home, your children get impatient because they want to hear you making music.

We all know – it would not work. We do not learn how to do things if we only acquire theoretical knowledge about the thing we want to learn. Acquiring *skills*, learning how to *do* things, is a completely – cognitively and physically – different learning process than learning the theory of playing the clarinet. This may seem like obvious wisdom, but I have found over and over that certain participants think they will learn how to work on conflict by listening to good presentations. Especially if they are high-ranking people. Organising institutions, too, want to deliver high-standard presentations on the state-of-the-art regarding various training topics. But if I understand training as a process and a means to reach positive, conflict-transforming impact, exercise is a crucial aspect. Participants will not apply methods and strategies that they have not learnt in practice. Thus "training" needs to encompass exercise and practice, ideally in relation to the participants' context and reality.

In addition, training needs reflection on what is going on and how it is affecting us. Let me explain why. Conflict is not a purely rational issue like arithmetic or logic, neither on the interpersonal level nor on the inter-group level. Conflict also has to do with emotions – with hatred, anger, fear, frustration, just to name a few – and with unfulfilled wishes and needs. And conflict often has to do with experiences from the past.

Neuroscience tells us that our brain has several parts and that they fulfil different roles (Roth 2003, 2005). The *cognitive* (declarative) area helps us to learn historical dates or the quantities given in a cooking recipe. One could say that the cognitive area has to do with facts. The *procedural* area is crucial for skills-learning: for driving and cycling, for preparing an excellent dinner, but also for facilitating a training process. That is why practice is so important for training. During presentations and discussion mainly the cognitive area is being fed. Only through exercises is the procedural area activated. We have a third essential brain area involved in learning, which is the *emotional* area. Here situations are evaluated with respect to whether they are good for us or threatening to us. In this area, experiences and emotions are interwoven. And since conflict always also has to do with emotions, needs, wishes and past experiences, this part of the brain is crucial for understanding conflict and for working on conflict. If we "neglect" it during training processes and focus on facts and skills only, the scope of possibilities to have positive impacts on conflict is not fully exploited. That is why "training" also needs to encompass reflection. A good training process has to offer learning spaces

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where things can be thought through, where past experiences and interpretations can be reframed, and where one's own role in conflicts can be critically analysed.

3. Experiences from training practice – Conclusions for training practice

Let me start with a few words on the connections I see between the characteristics of training processes and their impact. The limits of impact assessment are clearly given since no one can take a divine viewpoint. We can neither predict the future nor trace back a linear, causal chain between input and impact in a highly complex system. Who, furthermore, is willing to prove non-material impacts, which are pivotal for conflict transformation?

For an impact-sensitive training approach it is not enough to formulate impact hypotheses and indicators at a certain point and to set up a monitoring and evaluation process after a training event. Instead, we need to include this perspective for the whole training process. We have most control or influence for ensuring as many positive, conflict-transforming impacts as possible – paradoxically – not after a training course has been given but *before* the training process gets started and *while* the training process lasts.

In what follows I will therefore discuss key aspects of a training process, such as the situation analysis, the selection of participants and trainers, content and methodology, etc., and will focus on how to integrate the impact perspective within each of these aspects.

3.1 Situation analysis and strategy development

"The evidence is strong that the more peace practitioners know and understand about the situations in which they are working, the less likely they are to make mistakes and the more likely they are to identify productive avenues for working." (Anderson and Olson 2003, 45.)

By saying in the introduction that training is not an end but a means, I wanted to stress that training is part of an intervention strategy. This strategy should be chosen after a sound analysis of the situation was done. We expect certain effects from the training process and we expect that it fits smoothly within the overall strategy that comprises several other approaches.

Unfortunately, in my experience training for conflict transformation is too often limited to the organisation and realisation of training courses with conflict-related contents. I often have heard: "Capacity-building is the basic requirement. And training is *the* instrument of capacity-building." This is certainly true, but only effective if embedded in a broader conflict transformation perspective. In short: The perspective from which we need to be working is not that we want to facilitate training events, but that we want to develop an overall strategy for conflict transformation – including a sound situation and resource analysis – where training is one piece of this puzzle.

I am not arguing for banning small organisations or agencies, whose main focus is on training, from designing and delivering training workshops. I rather plead for joint efforts and strategies and more cooperation in the field. (I am quite aware that lots of problems are inherent in such an approach, but that should not deter us from making an effort.)

Necessary questions we need to answer in preparing a situation analysis and formulating a strategy are:
- What is the conflict situation about and what is it not about? (sound understanding)
- What do we want to change and why do we want these changes? (vision)
- What has to be done to realize these changes? (strategy)
- Can training be part of this overall strategy? If yes, which piece of the puzzle is it? (detailed and sequenced strategy)

3.2 Participants

In training we may work with groups, but first and foremost we work with the individual. What happens in the dynamic context of trainings regarding knowledge, skills and reflection/ reframing takes place first within a participant. Only as a second – or even further – step these individuals might have an influence on the group level or the level of society and politics in their conflict context. The big challenge in training therefore is how to work individually and impact socially.

You may want to contradict me at this point because during a training process there is a lot going on within the group and some results are only possible because the setting is a group and not a private lesson. While this is true, I am focussing on something different here. Seldom has one the "group in conflict", i.e. all the conflict parties involved, assembled within one training course. Reality often is that you have one, maybe a few representatives of one party involved, the other participants coming from different conflict contexts. Or you work with a group representing only one side in the conflict.

Change agents

When the decision is made that training is indeed a piece of the strategic puzzle, one of the next steps is to agree on the location and selection of possible participants. "Ideal" participants are those whose work during and after the training process might have a positive impact on the conflict situation the person lives in. What we look for are people who can bring changes to the conflict situation, so-called *change agents*. If possible, a group of actual or potential change agents from one conflict context should participate throughout the same training process. Such peer groups can give birth to ideas and approaches jointly during the process and support each other directly and morally.

There is another advantage of involving peer groups already during the training process. It is rare that one single person holds the key characteristics necessary for conflict transformation. Who is self-confident and self-reflective at the same time, who thinks in sharp and analytic ways *and* is emotional and intuitive? Who is open for coaching or counselling *and* holds staying power? Who has lots of experience and is (still) open for new ideas and methods? Who comes from the conflict context and holds necessary insights, and at the same time is respected by the different groups involved? And, finally, who is patient and relaxed yet, if necessary, can push certain issues?

Here are some examples of change agents I encountered during trainings. During one training course an outspoken woman participated, the wife of an organisation's director. This organisation had had a conflict going on for years with another organisation. Much energy was trapped in this conflict – and not free for field work. During the training process the woman said, "My next project has to be to work on the conflict with this organisation. Time is ripe." During another

course one participant was the personal consultant of the representative in parliament of a region where conflict escalated within one community and the mayor was killed. The participant afterwards kept email contact because his job was to consult the representative in parliament regarding the community conflict. Another participant represented the human rights ombudsman's office. He later asked for a training process for the office's staff working on the conflict in the area.

Absent participants

Sometimes, even change agents cannot bring any transforming impact to a conflict. For example, if hierarchies are too strong and directors of organisations or local leaders do not want any changes, this is a challenge. Therefore in training courses we need to think about present participants, but also about absent, "invisible" participants. What do I mean?

If possible, leaders and authorities have to be involved in training processes. Even if they do not participate, there are lots of ways they can be connected to the process. They can be partly involved during certain training sessions, e.g. transfer modules. They can be informed about the training's objectives, the training results, etc. They can become protectors of the training process. The key is to find creative ways in which leaders can take part in the training process so that training results can be transferred and have an impact on the conflict situation.

I remember one training where the organising agency invited the leaders for the opening session and a general introduction. Participants later on told me that this made a difference in the sense that they knew what was going on and picked up some things. Unfortunately the agency was unable to arrange for these leaders to re-join the course at the end when the transfer session started.

Group size

Personally, I like small training groups, i.e. one trainer and eight participants or two trainers and up to fourteen participants. Some of my colleagues prefer larger groups. What is important is that intensive work in small subgroups is possible, even if we work with larger groups.

Many agencies financing training events want to have one, perhaps two trainers for a group of twenty or more participants, because they are responsible for the resources spent for the event and want to have as many participants as possible on the list who profit from the event. I consider this, with respect to conflict transformation, as impact-inhibiting, especially if a majority of participants cannot be seen as change agents. In this case, the chosen quality criterion is the number of trained people and not their potential for impacts. Quantity is confused with quality. But high quantity does not guarantee any impacts. It is a misleading rationale to think that if we train 25 persons, at least 5 or 10 of them will transfer training results and thus bring about change – and impacts.

I prefer to work with a few people who I know, or at least can strongly guess, will transfer their skills and reframed perspectives to the conflict situation, rather than with many people who keep the learning inside – inside their person or their personal lives. I also prefer training fewer people because the possibility for impacts is higher the more intensively one works during a training process. This has to do, again, with the different brain areas involved in learning: the declarative, procedural and emotional one. Whereas the declarative and also the procedural brain can be "trained" relatively rapidly and up to old age, the emotional system and so the personality are formed very early. Any changes later on require a very intensive incident or process and/or a long-lasting one. The phenomenon of conflict, as I have explored in section 2, is closely related with the emotional brain area. To work on an individual's personality, attitudes, behaviour, emotions, world views, etc. thus requires intensive and often long-lasting processes. So to put it short and brutally: A few days of training with large groups are usually useless in terms of having impact.

Gender: Should we always strive for 50% women?

Have you had the same experience? When donors finance, and organisations set up, training events, one criterion for participant selection is gender balance. An appropriate gender mix seems "fulfilled" if 50% women and 50% men participate. Gender is "translated" to mean equal participation of men and women.

I favour a different "translation", because to ensure that equal numbers of men and women participate in a training process is no guarantee that these individuals will transfer training results to their contexts, which is the necessary condition for training impacts. Instead, the situation analysis and strategy planning should include clear statements about how men and women are involved and affected by the conflict, and how strategies should meet their common and particular needs and draw on the particular potentials both have for conflict transformation work. Too often, analyses do not comprise this perspective, and strategies suffer from this lack. Related to this, we need to look for change agents among men and women. Leaders should, if possible, be involved. Can we win their support for a gender-sensitive conflict intervention? From such an understanding of gender and gender-awareness follows that a more context-appropriate approach might be to have different trainings for men and women. In another case, it might be advisable to have more men, and in yet another to have more women, participating. What should be avoided is an automatic response to the issue of gender in training, which assumes that numerical equality is the end of the debate.

In one training a representative from the foundation organising the event told me that unfortunately they did not meet a gender balance because more men than women participated. He said they tried but it was not possible. Yet he was closer to the particular needs and potentials in his context than others because they had had a sound participant location and selection process, including interviews, to make sure that participants were, or had the potential to be, change agents.

In general, with respect to choosing participants, we need to address these necessary questions:
- Do we manage to select individuals with an impact potential (so-called change agents)?
- Are levels of leadership connected to the training process? (absent participants)
- Can the ratio of trainers to participants guarantee intensive work on the individual level for each participant? (group size)
- Are both genders' needs (common and particular) and potentials for conflict transformation met by the training design? (gender awareness)

3.3 Trainers

To keep expectations realistic: In what follows, no list will be given of all the indispensable qualities of a trainer. I will not come up with a profile along the lines of "know-it-all/will-do-it-all/won't-cost-a-thing" (something we call the "eierlegende Wollmilchsau" in German: a pig that lays eggs, gives milk and produces wool).

The trainer herself, if she is not an activist from the conflict context, will not directly influence the conflict situation during or after the training process. If one can link the trainer with conflict-transforming impacts, this can only be done indirectly through the participants: The trainer works with the participants and they, in turn, work in the conflict context.

The question, then, is how appropriate trainers can be chosen for a training process: trainers who will accomplish, jointly with the participants, that they – the participants – transfer

training results and so have impacts. From my experience I deduce various criteria.

A trainer needs *experience from field practice* and not from desk studies. If participants recognize that this person has working experience in conflict-prone areas, they take her seriously, a necessary condition for every learning process. And they learn from her examples more than from her theories (what participants usually remember are the examples, not so much the theoretical framework). Often they even take the trainer as an example.

Trainer teams are best. Working in teams indirectly shows participants that best results are obtained when different individuals work together. (Of course, a precondition is that you have mature characters who are able to work effectively in teams.) Good teams are mixed (men/women, regional/international trainers, senior/junior trainers, etc.). When working with regional trainers, I often bring in my experience from different situations and with different approaches. My regional colleagues tell me – already during the preparation process – if participants will connect with the method or the examples chosen for exercises. And they suggest other ways that are culturally grounded.

Learning to a large extent is an unconscious activity. The only things we can learn consciously are facts – and, as I have discussed in section 2, we learn and store these in the declarative brain area. Skills – in the procedural brain – and issues concerning the personality – in the emotional brain – are acquired unconsciously. A good conflict transformation trainer therefore has to be able to *facilitate unconscious learning processes*: through his tone of voice, behaviour, facial expressions, gestures, questions (which can trigger emotional states), facilitation capacities, non-partisan/multi-partisan attitude, etc. For the potential of conflict-transforming impacts this is crucial, and more important than transmitting lots of facts to the participants. Necessary conditions for unconscious learning processes are a *good relationship* with the participants and the *authentic attitude and personality* of the trainer. I will only "follow" somebody if I can trust this person (leaving aside coercion, which would not be helpful in this context at all).

The possibility for conflict-transforming impacts is high if, during the training process, participants connect the training contents with their own situation – individually – and with their conflict context – regionally and socially. To *create* this *connection* is part of the trainer's job. Personally, I have good experiences with *majeutik*, the Socratic midwife approach[2]: If possible, I do not bring in all the ideas, examples for exercises and methods from outside but try to set up a learning situation so that participants themselves come up with their own ideas, examples and methods. My role is to facilitate the group of participants through this process, following an elicitive approach (Lederach 1995).

> Thus, when looking for a trainer, we need to answer these necessary questions:
> - Does the trainer have experiences from field practice, if possible from the region?
> - Can we work with trainer teams? How should they be composed?
> - Is the trainer able to set up learning environments and to facilitate learning processes, especially unconscious processes?
> - Can the trainer start processes that allow participants to connect training contents with their own situation – on an individual level but also on a regional/society level?

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2 Socrates, Athenian philosopher (470-399 BC), was the son of a midwife. He often compared his way of teaching and asking questions with his mother's profession: It was not he himself who had to give birth to ideas; rather, he had to support others by helping them to give birth to their own ideas. This approach is called *majeutik*.

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3.4 Beyond best practice: Contents and formats (What? and How?)

Often, training models (contents and formats) are oriented on best practice: What has worked well in my other training events? What do I know from others about their successful trainings? What did others publish in their training manuals? Especially in challenging situations one is glad to receive information on what has worked well in other, possibly similar contexts.

I think this is a good basis, because to know and learn from what others have done in different contexts gives helpful insights for one's own strategies. Participants often give this feedback: "Your examples and insights were helpful and the first step towards a new avenue to work on our conflict situation." But best practice is neither a synonym nor a guarantee for positive impacts. There are more aspects to keep in mind when setting up a training process with conflict-transforming potentials.

Needs

I remember a participant – an ex-guerrilla in the Salvadoran Farabundo Marti Front for National Liberation (FMNL) – telling me that they received mental health and (traumatic-) stress training during the reintegration process. Most of them could not connect to this process because they started each session with breathing and fitness exercises. They were guerrilla fighters and used to three and more hours of daily intensive fitness training. The western approach did not meet their realities and needs. Best practice exercises here inhibited a fruitful training process and, as a consequence, the potential for impacts in the ex-combatants' communities.

An impact-oriented training has to start with the participants' needs and potentials. The trainers need to meet participants where they currently are and accompany them through the process to reach the agreed training objectives. If participants' needs and potentials are respected and met, there is a good probability that they will transfer training results and thus produce conflict-transforming impacts.

Context

For all the different training contents – conflict perception and analysis, conflict dynamics, strategy planning, communication processes, mediation, negotiation, etc. – there are hands-on instruments and methods, and lots of valuable resource materials exist to use in training courses. Many agencies have published trainers' manuals for training events. Personally, I find helpful, among others, the following resource books:
- *Konfliktmanagement* by Friedrich Glasl (1993)
- *Move Manual* by Manfred Oepen (2003)
- *Participatory Learning & Action* by Jules N. Pretty et al. (1995)
- *Peace Skills* by Ronald Kraybill (2001)
- *Resource Pack for Conflict Transformation* by International Alert (1996)
- *Working with Conflict* by Simon Fischer et al. from Responding to Conflict (2000)

Here, detailed information and instructions are given on how to facilitate trainings for conflict transformation. But unless they are grounded in the participants' context, participants will not be able to transfer them.

When I facilitated a training focussed on mediation processes, a participant working in Cambodia told me that she liked the training, and that mediation was simple and complex at the same time. But within traditional rural Cambodia where she works the western approach would not work. The traditional structures and values do not "foresee" such an approach. In Cambodia the role

of an arbitrator might be a more appropriate approach.

Training practice that is aware of its context has at least two characteristics: First, the examples one uses during a training process, especially case studies and role plays, have to resonate with the participants' regional and cultural context. At least participants should be able to connect to the examples. The same needs to be true for cases used in conflict analysis exercises. And, second, the methods and instruments introduced and applied during the process have to be applicable in the participants' local and regional contexts. Otherwise they will have had an interesting experience and learnt quite a few things on an individual level but they will not be able to transfer them to their realities. And no transfer means – no impacts.

Focus on process and continuous learning

As a trainer I prefer facilitating processes and opening spaces for learning rather than teaching best practice – knowledge and skills that are considered state-of-the-art.

From the trainer's side this requires the attitude not to be responsible for results or solutions but to be responsible for the facilitation of a process so that participants can connect with the issues at stake and are challenged to come up with their own, and maybe new, results. The core idea is that participants do not learn single steps or internalise instructions, but learn what the whole issue is about so they can develop their own rules and steps. To use an illustration from school once more: Instead of learning arithmetic by practising on different examples over and over again, I can learn the logic and rules behind a calculation. Then I can apply them to each type of example. And I can come up with mnemonics that work best for me.

From the participants' side this requires responsibility for the learning process. The trainer does not take sole responsibility for training results, but shares it with the whole group. Furthermore, this requires an active, participative stance from the trainees (rather than a passive, consumptive mode). But since – when getting back to their local contexts – this active stance is necessary anyhow to ensure a transfer of learning and a possibility of having impact, I prefer that participants already take it during the training sessions.

This form of training practice is both genuine and suitable. I consider it as genuine because the ideas, approaches or solutions participants come up with during the training process for their conflicts are really theirs. It is not something imported from outside. So usually the degree of identification with what they did and learnt is high – a prerequisite for transfer and impact. Earlier, I said that for trainers it is important to be authentic. The same is true for the change agents working in the field. If they "copy" best practice and have not personalized or internalised what the heart of the issue is, they will not "convince". If they have "penetrated" the issue and come up with something of their own, this makes an essential difference. The process and learning focus is suitable because participants know best what their region and their culture are like and on what they can count (resources, structures, values, etc.) when transferring training results. "Imported solutions" always run the risk that they are not applicable in the participants' context – thus inhibiting transfer and impacts.

Reflection

Explaining my understanding of training for conflict transformation I stressed that it is not only about knowledge and skills, but also about reflection, since the emotional brain has a pivotal role in conflict. Learning spaces have to be opened where past experiences and interpretations can be reframed and where one's own role in conflicts can be understood. Reflection helps in becoming aware of what is going on, what we perceive and evaluate, and how we behave. And how others do.

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It makes the invisible visible, the unconscious conscious. Becoming aware of unconscious conflict patterns and behaviours opens the possibility for change, for breaking with destructive thinking and action. It is a necessary condition for conflict-transforming impacts.

It is a wonderful experience when participants become aware of how often the conflict is seen and interpreted almost completely in relation to "the others": "They are the problem, they are guilty, if they would have done otherwise we wouldn't have such problems now." When participants become aware what consequences such a world view brings, the perspective changes: a different point of view starts with what our group needs and wants and does not get. All of a sudden, conflict starts with us, and not with the others.

Reflection, though, is not only about the past. It is also about the present and the future. During training much learning happens unconsciously. Therefore reflection units are helpful to see what was going on during the last days or hours and to become aware of things that happen unconsciously.

When participants work on situation analyses in small groups, I like to have one or two interim plenaries where a process report is given and where first results can be presented. The other small group(s) have the chance to give feedback and to gain some insights from the presenting group's work. Even if such an interim-plenary is not openly titled "reflection unit", this is exactly what happens. The reflection results can be seen to have an effect when a second phase of group work starts and when "final results" are presented in the plenary.

Finally, reflection in the future means that during the participants' later work on the ground reflection has to continue. When I talk about training as a process, this is part of the process. I will say more in the next section.

With respect to contents and formats of training practice, then, we need to answer these necessary questions:
- Does the training process start by taking into consideration the participants' situation, where they come from?
- Does it respect participants' needs and potentials?
- Are training objectives agreed between organisers, trainers and participants?
- Can participants connect to the examples given and methods introduced? Can they apply methods and instruments in their regional and cultural contexts?
- Is there room during the training process for participants to come up with or develop their own ideas, approaches and solutions?
- Is there room for reflection and reframing concerning the past, present and future?

3.5 The training process

Most trainings are not processes but events. Often they are short and one-off events. I already explained why I refer with "training" to a process rather than an event: Training handled as an event reduces the possibility for transfer and thus impacts minimally, because training and reality tend to remain disconnected after the event ends.

When talking about a process, I mean a combination of different approaches (blended learning) which will be realized in a defined space of time. For example: At the end of the core learning phase, where knowledge and skill transfer takes place and reframing happens, training continues with what is traditionally called follow-up opportunities, like peer counselling or

coaching. (Strictly speaking, I do not even see these as different phases. Training and learning always continues during peer counselling and coaching as well.) There is a variety of possible blends for conflict transformation trainings. And there are no strict borders between the training process and other activities within the overall strategy. What each single blend will look like depends on different criteria.

One crucial ingredient is the initial *situation analysis and strategy development.* This will guide the decision whether to have a long-term (i.e. one to four months) core training and then coaching on a regular basis (online, via telephone, and/or face-to-face) for the trained change agents, maybe mixed with additional facts-and-skills learning blocks when needed. Alternatively, one might decide to have a short introductory training, followed by a coached online course transmitting the basics of conflict transformation, followed by a core block of one or two weeks of face-to-face work, and then coaching on a regular basis to ease the transfer between training laboratory and field reality. Or, again, one might opt for regular bimonthly training blocks without distance learning.

Another set of criteria are the communities' or agencies' *capacities and resources* at hand. I often hear that there is no money for ongoing coaching of the participants and no money to bring people together later. I often answer that then the expected outcome – that the participants' work in the field will have impacts on the conflicts – will be reduced to a minimum. In such circumstances, I would prefer to have fewer training events, but at least a few training *processes*.

When starting a training process in South America, it was agreed from the beginning that the regional colleague would subsequently coach the participants. Even during the first face-to-face sessions, they already put topics on the agenda for their first coaching. Participants who wanted to repeat the training week with their communities knew that they could ask for an experienced trainer to guide them during their first course. My experience tells me that participants are generally more dedicated, because they know from the beginning that they do not just get a nice week off from work, but make a serious commitment.

You may wonder why I put such emphasis on these follow-ups. Like I said at the beginning, participants (and I include myself) face real problems and challenges when they are back in their conflict contexts. Questions come up when one gets back to work. Or problems come up because the others who did not participate in the training process are not willing to cooperate on conflict-transforming approaches. At this point, ongoing "support" is necessary, preferably direct support, because otherwise participants are likely to give up at a certain point and withdraw or, forced by group pressure, fall back into old patterns.

> Necessary questions we need to answer regarding training process design are:
> - After situation analysis and strategy planning, what follows for the blending of the training process?
> - When participants are selected, do they have capacities for distance learning, or would regular face-to-face training blocks be more effective?
> - Are participants briefed that a process starts, rather than an event, and what this signifies for their level of commitment?
> - Are trainers aware that their commitment does not end with the face-to-face training courses but continues afterwards, online, on the phone and face-to-face?

3.6 Concern for negative impacts

When organisations leave the culture of one-off training events behind and instead use training *processes*, still, not only positive but also negative impacts will occur.

I remember participants who wanted to set up a dialogue between different groups in their community after a training. We took enough time so that they could prepare well for that challenge during the training sessions. The parties involved agreed but after a few encounters the first left the room, stating that it was worthless to do these things. After that, the minimum of communication that had existed beforehand broke down completely for quite a while. The effort to better communicate in this case actually resulted in a communication breakdown.

How can we avoid negative impacts? My answer is: We are asking the wrong question. Because we cannot avoid them, there will almost always be negative impacts as well. If we intervene in a situation in order to change it, the sun will not shine brighter everywhere afterwards. To expect this would be an illusion. Conflict transformation would be the only "change management process" where no negative impacts occur. (Behind this stance lies the assumption that the result of conflict transformation is not a state where everybody is happy. It is a state where everybody can say, "I can live with this situation, and with myself, and what I need is respected".)

So what are the alternatives? No intervention at all, or just training events with no transfer from the individual to the level of society, cannot be the answer. Neither can we just ignore negative impacts.

I choose another way of dealing with this problem and will pose different questions: How can we decide which negative impacts are acceptable, and how do we know when to stop or change activities? When training is seen and performed as a process, one can try to keep track of the possible negative impacts. Initial reflection on possible negative impacts can take place during strategy planning, and regular impact reflection should take place during the first training blocks. The same holds for formal and informal peer counselling and coaching settings. When necessary the group can decide to look for other options and go alternative ways.

Necessary questions we need to address are therefore:
- Is the perspective that negative impacts will also occur accepted from the beginning by all involved?
- Are there answers, or at least criteria for an answer, to the questions of which negative impacts are acceptable and when do we have to stop and change activities?
- Are there working sessions scheduled throughout the process when participants and trainers reflect on the consequences of their actions?

4. Conclusion

In this article, I have led you down different tracks on an exploration of the training-for-conflict-transformation world. The exploration's objective was to find possible answers to the question, "How can training for conflict transformation have an impact on conflict transformation?"

The main tracks we followed were: training as a process, and the possibilities for integrating the impact question within the training-as-a-process perspective. We took several side paths and on each I tried to show how the ground for achieving impacts can already be prepared when designing and setting up a training process. The aspects I discussed were: situation analysis

and strategy development, training participants, trainers, contents and formats, the training process, and negative impacts.

I am quite aware that we missed several other important tracks and that on those we passed, there would have been a lot more to see. Now, though, it is up to you to explore these and other tracks, on your own or with your organisation: How can you make sure that your training activities can have an impact on conflict transformation?

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