

# Team and Organisational Development as a Means for Conflict Prevention and Resolution

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# Team and Organisational Development as a Means for Conflict Prevention and Resolution

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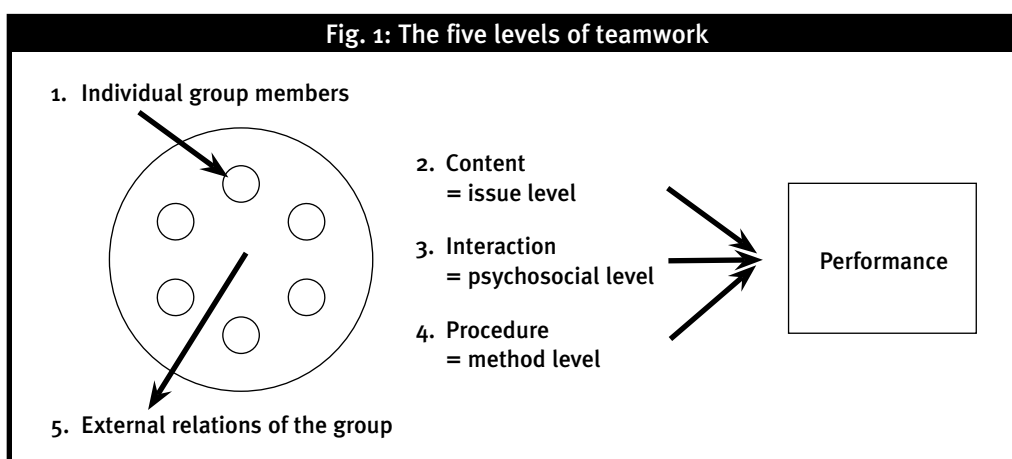
## 1. Introduction

Most professional third parties working in the fields of conflict resolution, peace building and conflict settlement are themselves operating in some form of organisational context and function as members of a team in a large-scale organisation. Consequently, they are often subject to tensions and conflicts, which can impair their activity in the field.

In a representative survey conducted in the Netherlands during 1984 (Glasl 1984), social workers throughout the country were questioned about conflicts in their organisational environment. The results show that the very individuals who regularly and successfully help their clients to solve ‚hot‘ conflicts (carried out openly and with great emotion) themselves suffer from many ‚cold‘ conflicts (expressed covertly) in their own organisations, and generally fail to deal with these in a professional manner. Instead, such conflicts are deflected or allowed to drag on, and have destructive ramifications on the client-related work in the field of conflict. In some cases, the stress of this situation can even lead to burn-out problems and retreat from this field of occupation. Protagonists in conflicts are also faced with similar stresses.

It is for this reason that a proper understanding of conflict potential within teams and organisations is imperative. In this chapter, we will outline the most frequently observed potential sources of conflict, and then suggest some possible ways to utilise conflict transformation and resolution. After all, at least during the first three stages of escalation (Glasl 1999, 83ff), the affected parties can usually themselves undertake the work of conflict resolution with a good chance of success. It is only later that it becomes necessary for organisations to call in professional external assistance from conflict experts in order to deal with their own internal problems of conflict (Glasl 1999, 118ff).

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## 2. Teams as potential for conflict

Teams are defined as work groups that are charged with the fulfilment of a performance task that requires joint cooperation. This distinguishes them clearly from other groups, which might instead seek to attain individual learning results that are acquired in groups, or merely cultivate social and other forms of contacts.

In order to achieve this desired performance, good conditions must either exist or be created at all five levels within the team (Fig. 1).

The five levels of teamwork are defined as follows:

1. **Individual group members:** this is a function of the individual personalities, as well as of their perceptions, concepts and ideas, emotions, intentions and behaviours.
2. **Content, issue level:** the focus here is on the issue topic and on the task to be performed.
3. **Interaction, psychosocial level:** the mutual attitudes of the group members are important, as well as the state of relations between them and the observed climate, roles and behaviour patterns.
4. **Procedure, method level:** techniques of problem-solving in a team, such as analysis methods, decision methods, creativity techniques, formal internal rules for the team and use of auxiliary means.
5. **External group relations:** the way in which information and contacts are cultivated with the rest of the organisation including rules regarding deputising.

Each of these five levels can spawn potential for conflict and can therefore also be a good starting point for conflict resolution. As the levels are also mutually networked, they can also influence each other and thus create further indirect potential for conflict. The dynamics of a group are, consequently, complicated and difficult to analyse. Often a problem will arise at one level, for instance on level 4, if a complex decision is to be taken with unsuitable methods, but be manifested for example at level 3 (interaction/psychosocial level), as team relations become burdened by mutual irritation. Finally, this could conceivably lead to further consequences at level 1 (the individual group member), if one person chooses to leave the group, depriving the team of his or her knowledge and skills.

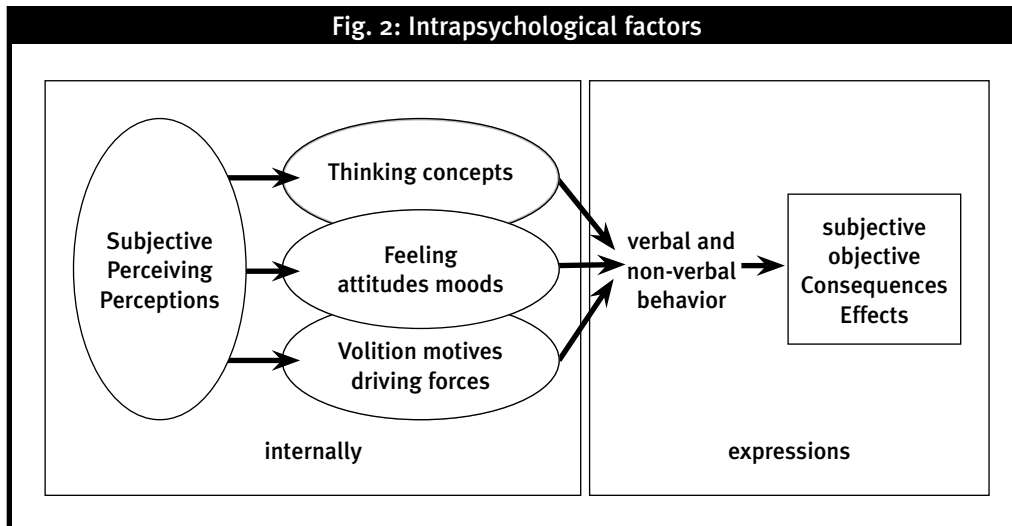
## 3. Potential for Conflict at the Five Levels of Team Work

### 3.1 The individual group member as potential for conflict

A group member can struggle with *intrapsychological* tensions and conflicts, and express these externally as he seeks to cooperate with other team members. The known conflict mechanisms in this context (Rubin, Pruitt and Kim 1994, 11ff; Glasl 1997, 34ff; Glasl 1999, 19ff) usually appear within individuals (Fig. 2) and corrupt their perceptions, thinking, feeling, volition and external behaviour.

These intra-psychological mechanisms can only be generally sketched out at this point. Nevertheless, understanding them is critical if conflicts are to be successfully processed in teams or organisations.

The *perception capability* of the individual can be strongly impaired through the effects of stress, tension and pressure. The result can lead to selective or distorted perception, 'cognitive short-sightedness', or even the fading out of perceptions that do not conform to the preconceived picture. This is how prejudices occur and become fixed, since all evidence which might contradict previous perceptions is suppressed and disregarded.



The *concepts* and *ideas* which people form on the basis of such distorted perceptions are likely to become hardened into one-sided, black-and-white pictures, which can no longer easily be corrected by further evidence or perceptions. Only information that confirms the prejudice is acknowledged.

In the *emotional sector*, empathy dries up. People become encapsulated one from another, prisoners of their own feelings. Sympathy and antipathy serve to create a polarised emotional picture. If the conflict escalates, this can take on autistic dimensions, as all point of reference to the outside world is lost.

In the *volitional sector*, unconscious and semiconscious driving forces and motives become dominant. There can even be a trend towards fanaticism, as volition hardens into an 'all or nothing' approach characterised by demands expressed in the form of ultimatums.

Perceiving, thinking, feeling and willing all mutually reinforce one another in a vicious spiral and the tensions can be even more difficult when they contradict each other. As escalation gyrates outwards, it can lead to regression in all areas dealing with values. People no longer behave in line with the maturity commensurate with their age level. Instead, in encounters with their opponents in the conflict, their thinking, feeling and volition develop patterns which would be more appropriate to earlier development phases, but now no longer conform to the degree of maturity one should reasonably expect from them.

In the *external behaviour* of these individuals, a notable impoverishment appears. A wealth of variants is lost, as behaviour becomes stereotyped and can even deteriorate to the point of compulsiveness, as the actor loses effective control of his actions.

Inevitably, this will lead to *consequences* in the conflict behaviour, which corresponds to an increasing loss of self-awareness. The undesired and subconscious side effects thus gain the upper hand over the desired and conscious consequences of willed behaviour.

Conflict resolution techniques can and should be applied to any one or more of these domains. Thus, the multi-track-approach, working at different levels, has for some time already been practised in both the micro- and meso-social sectors. Practitioners have worked at unravelling false perceptions (Blake and Mouton 1964; Burton 1969; Walton 1969), allowing distorted perception mechanisms to be cleared and hardened concepts to be dissolved. In addition to this, they have had some success in healing polarised emotions, so that empathy can be revived. Fixation

on ultimatums can be properly addressed by examining alternative modes of action, as well as by reviewing one's own patterns of volition. Some of the behaviours they are referring to here can be purposeful and controlled.

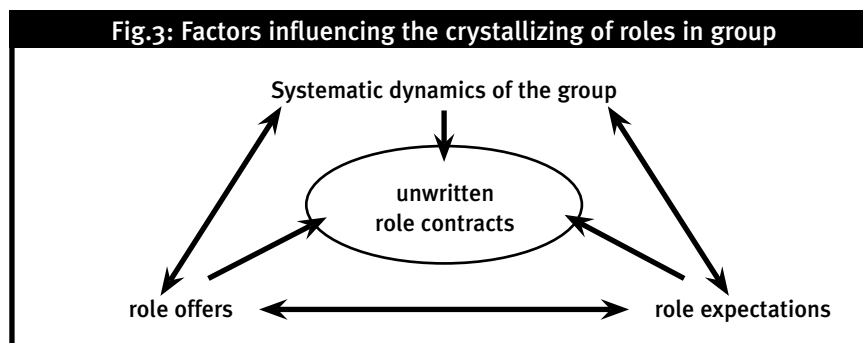
### 3.2 The content or the issue level as potential for conflict

Officially, issues are the very substance of negotiations. Rational individuals often assume that conflicts cannot arise as long as everybody remains objective. However, as a conflict escalates, issue-related and psychosocial issues become increasingly mixed. It may be necessary to collect and unravel the various themes in a dispute and look at them more precisely. Potential for conflict can easily arise at this level if practitioners fail to recognise that any issue can be perceived and assessed differently from the different perspectives of varying subject disciplines. Unfortunately, concepts can only rarely be clarified to everyone's satisfaction: the result is misunderstandings and misinterpretations. There may be a failure to identify the real issues.

### 3.3 The interaction or psychosocial level as potential for conflict

Groups too must learn to deal with their differences openly. Such openness can only be possible if the necessary measures of esteem and confidence have developed among the participants – „confidence that my team mates respect me and that I will not be excluded from the group, even if I say something critical“. This confidence is the ‚topsoil‘ in which open communication and the constructive processing of conflicts flourish.

Each group will need to organise itself around certain roles if it is to both achieve its goals and also maintain cohesion as a team. Certain influences are extended onto the group both from the outside world and from interactions at the social level, which may well lead to the forming of group-specific interaction patterns from which individuals will find that they can only withdraw with difficulty.



In order for groups to be able to work productively, certain core tasks must be performed. The responsibility for these, and the corresponding actions, are frequently assigned to the same individuals. Belbin (1992) investigated a number of these role types in groups, and organised them into a model. Some group members, for instance, regularly assume responsibility for creative ideas; others are particularly active when it comes to assessing, while others in turn work mostly in the field of monitoring and control.

Conflicts tend to occur when a group member:

- feels pressure from the group to assume a role which they do not want and to which he or she objects;
- experiences the allocated roles as constraining and inhibiting development;

- feels that the sanctions imposed, in order to induce him or her to maintain a role, are incommensurate;
- cannot develop acquired capabilities in the assigned role;
- wishes to go beyond an extrinsic definition of his or her role to self-definition.

In every group there are hierarchy roles. Each group member will ask themselves more or less consciously: „What is my value to this organisation? Do the others acknowledge that value? Am I superfluous or can I sometimes play ‚top dog?‘“ Aware team members will also ask themselves whether the role expectations connected with their own self-image can be fulfilled in this group and above all whether the situation in which they find themselves might one day pose a threat to their own self-confidence.

The following questions are of particular importance in this context:

- What position does the formal leader of the group occupy in terms of these hierarchies?
- Is there an informal leader who is held in higher regard by the group than the formal one?

It is essential, if good cooperation is to develop in teams, for all participants to be flexible and to assume various roles according to the requirements of the situation. For example, team members must be prepared to proceed with the objective task, or instead to work to promote the climate within the group. Sometimes they will assume leadership, while at other times, they will perform supporting tasks. Individuals who are too strongly fixated on their own roles – for example the shy person, the dominant person, the one who talks all the time, or the clown – can inhibit the process of cooperation. Group members must rather learn to recognise their own distinct behaviour patterns and role expectations, to review these and to adapt them to the given situation. Thus, a high degree of role flexibility is the critical hallmark of properly developed teams.

### 3.4 The procedure/method level and its potential for conflict

Conflicts are often initially experienced as relation-specific, even though the problems can actually be traced to a poor selection of work methods. If, for example, a decision is reached by means of an unsuitable method, it can lead to tensions between the group members. It is simply not possible to plane wood with a screwdriver, nor is it feasible to fasten screws with a plane. Teams must learn and familiarise themselves with a variety of working procedures and methods, and must become good at reaching right decisions as to which procedure is most suitable for which purpose.

In practice, many different methods have been developed for a wide variety of purposes. In her study of methods, Anna Grandori (1984) has distinguished between various rules (prescriptive principles) which govern the various methods:

- (i) Search rules, search methods:** how can we identify alternative solutions?
- (ii) Selection rules, selection methods:** how can we then select the preferred alternative for this problem?
- (iii) Learning rules, learning methods:** how can we efficiently obtain information about a particular alternative?

These rules or methods will vary, depending on

- *the degree of uncertainty* (available information or lack of knowledge); and
- *the degree of conflicting interest* (compatibility or non-compatibility).

If all relevant facts and data are known, so that the team enjoys a fairly high degree of security, a decision will be reached differently than in situations with substantial uncertainty, for instance about future economic or political developments. Furthermore, if the persons or groups

involved in the decision insist on asserting particular interests from the very start, the team will behave differently than it would if the team members were less fixated on pre-existing standpoints.

At present many training and coaching sessions teach different techniques to the extent that an adequate survey of the field has become virtually impossible. Many trainers seek to position their specific approach to decision-making as their own branded product for reasons of competition. As a result, the same methods – often only with slight changes – can be found bearing a wide variety of names, without any credit given to the original method and its creator or author. This inevitably leads to a dispute on method if practitioners make the claim that their own approach is the best and is universally applicable. If group members have thus attended different training sessions, they may subsequently find themselves in conflict with one another as to which method is best for them. It is only when they manage to recognise and clearly define which method best serves a specific purpose that such a dispute can be effectively resolved.

Alexander Bos (1974), in his model of „dynamic judgement formation“ (see Ballreich 2000) distinguishes between two kinds of process:

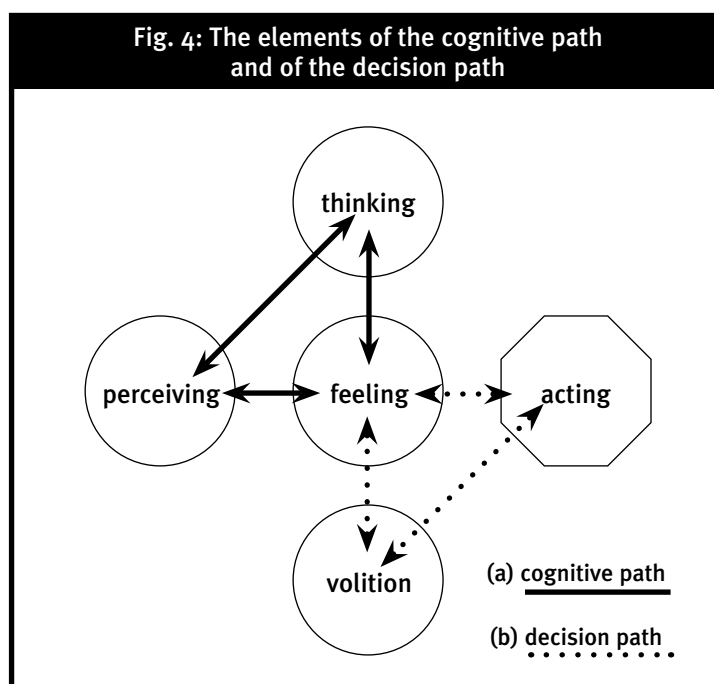
(i) **thinking and cognitive path**, i.e. processes for analysing or diagnosing a problem in order to gain better knowledge; and

(ii) **volition and decision path**, i.e. processes for identifying and selecting goals and alternative courses of action.

Both cases involve a process of judgement formation in which feeling plays a central role. In the case of the *cognitive path*, the team must seek to bring about a synthesis of feeling, between perceiving and reflecting. In the case of the *decision path*, it is mainly a matter of forming a bridge, by means of feeling, between the goals and the advance thinking of possibilities for realisation of those goals by means of concrete actions and behaviours.

In conjunction with the model shown above in Fig. 2, this can be illustrated as in Fig. 4:

Bos also notes that some processes pursue this path in a *linear-sequential* fashion (see Glasl 1999, 127ff). Here, the teams gather all available facts in the cognitive path, in order that they can consider and reflect on these, then interpret and classify them. In the decision path, on the other



hand, according to the linear sequential school, team goals are first set and discussed; only then can the possible implementation paths be examined and selected.

According to Bos (1974, 52ff), these approaches are to be contrasted with the „dynamic judgement forming“ model, which argues instead for regular *rhythmic alternation* between the given poles of perceiving-thinking and volition-acting. In a cyclical procedure, team perceptions are continuously revisited in the cognitive path while formed concepts are repeatedly reviewed on the basis of what is perceived. Feelings of amazement or evidence-experience, of apprehension or release, of consistency or inconsistency also play a major role in this connection. In short, feeling is at the heart of judgement forming, as is illustrated below in the schematic representation. The situation is similar in the decision path, as goals are examined and tested for feasibility and desirability. Only when feelings are perceived to be congruent with what is wanted and thought out in advance, is it possible to take a firm and binding decision.

It is further possible to distinguish between different phases within this process of dynamic judgement forming. First, teams must make sure that they collect sufficient empirical material: the facts must be clearly established before interpretation and assessment can begin. Thus, qualitative phases will develop, within which a rhythmic searching motion, in the spirit of Bos, can take place. Fig. 5 shows four such qualitative phases on both the cognitive and the decision paths, from a bird's eye perspective. Although the specific features of the cognitive and decision paths are of importance, we will focus solely upon the principle features of the model.

The findings of Grandori and Bos concerning the potentials for conflict can be summarised as follows:

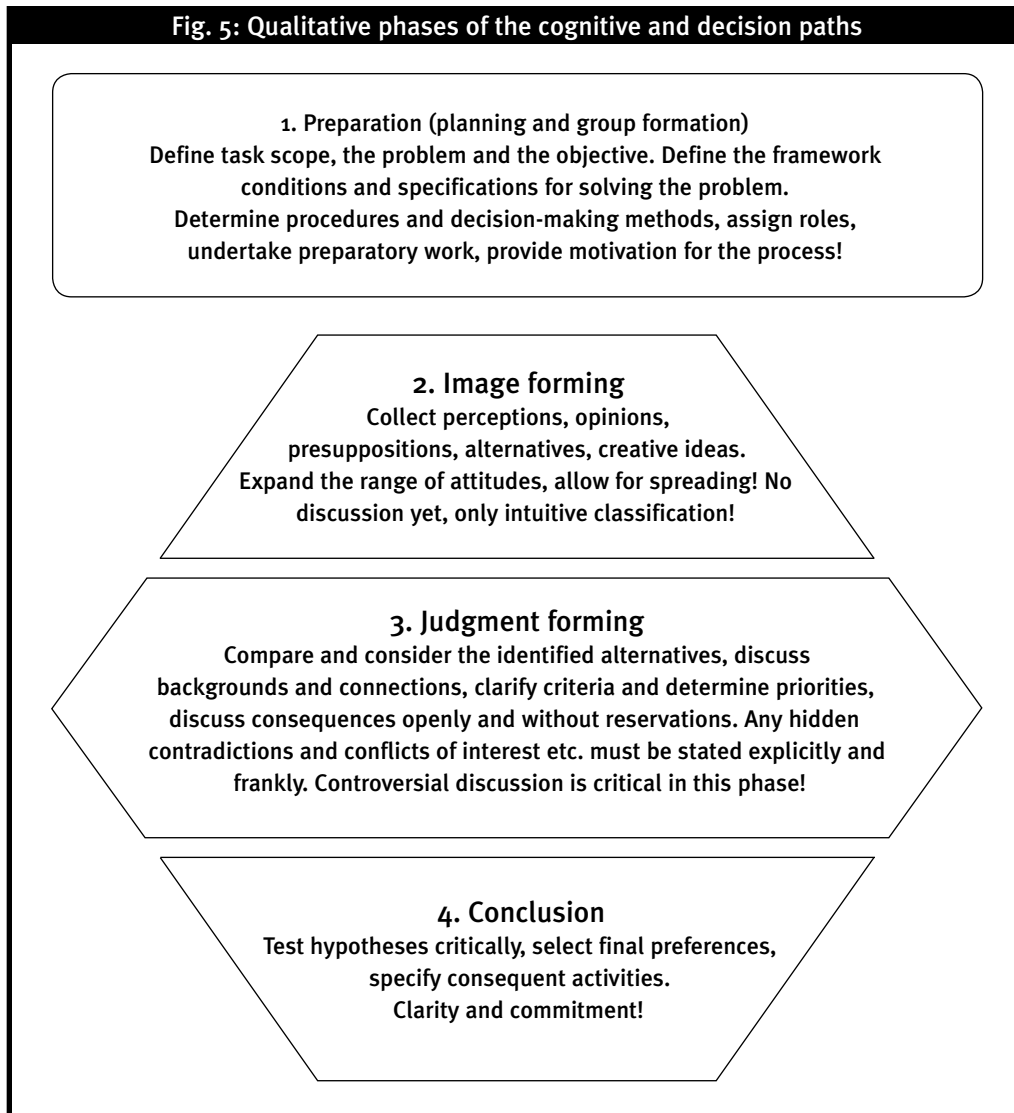
In the *preparation (planning and group formation)* phase, according to Grandori's model, learning methods are particularly important, since they will govern advance thinking in an initially unmanageable period. Building on this, both feeling and volition will play a crucial role; otherwise, the group activity can quickly lose energy due to a ‚cold start‘. If teamwork is undertaken without adequate enthusiasm, no team member will subsequently identify with the results. Here, the group may experience a struggle between flows, as some members prefer to work spontaneously and intuitively (dominance of the volition pole), while others insist on detailed planning (dominance of the thinking pole). Furthermore, if the scope of tasks, problem complexity and objectives and the decision-making methods are not clarified sufficiently from the start, the team will experience difficulties in terms of a damaging loss of orientation.

In the *image-forming phase*, according to Grandori, the searching and learning methods become the most important. As explained by Bos, the polarity between perceiving and thinking, most of all, affects an exhaustive review of perception.

Potential for conflict can arise whenever a team lacks the necessary range of perspectives and thus cannot sufficiently expand its range of approaches. Accordingly, if the team commences discussion (the judgement-forming phase) prematurely, it will risk reinforcing any existing preconceived opinions by selective perception. If gathered material is classified too early on the basis of purely rational criteria, this can also lead to tensions, as already formed and unreflective thinking patterns can hinder the discovery of new elements.

In the *judgment-forming phase*, the searching and selection methods will be the most critical. Bos emphasises the importance of feeling along with the poles of perceiving-thinking, in order by controversial discussion to derive the full benefit from existing differences and ensure that the group does not fall prey to „group-think“ (Janis 1972). Janis studied group behaviour in various crisis situations and showed how group pressure can exert negative sanctions on diverging opinions. This can be exemplified by group members, who, for fear of being excluded, are forced to join the





dominant group against their better principles and conscience. The constructive confrontation that would be required, here, must approach differences and contradictions not as threats, but instead as a source of enrichment for the group. The more forcefully the differences are articulated at the issue level, the more important it will be to express acknowledgement and regard for the person of the opponent or dissident at this level of interaction.

In the *conclusion phase*, Grandori says that the searching methods will dominate, as the team seeks to reach agreement on the most plausible finding. According to Bos, thinking and feeling now play the greatest roles. Potential for conflict will arise, however, as soon as doubts concerning the validity of the conclusions reached in the process arise, and the group begins to energetically contest any team member who questions the group findings. The more mature groups will make sure that they include fundamental questioning in the final phase of their work as a form of self-performed quality control. Nevertheless, it can lead to irritations if one group member brings in new information at ‚five minutes to midnight‘, data that should have been gathered much earlier, in the concept-forming phase.

Particular attention should be drawn in this phase towards an orientation of feelings and pragmatic action, as supported by appropriate selection methods. The question as to whether the

leader's vote alone is sufficient for a decision, or whether a majority decision or general consensus are necessary, cannot primarily be answered ideologically. Rather, it is better for a team to specify its preferred decision-making method earlier, in the preparatory phase, so that the rules will not need to be changed while the game is in process, which generally gives rise to conflicts.

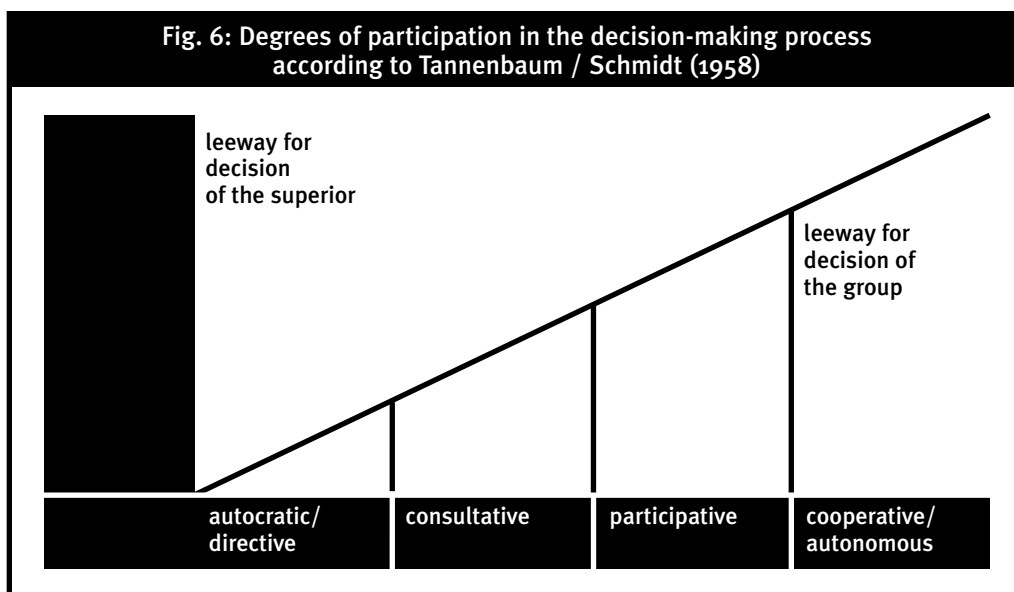
The question of whether or not a consensus decision is advisable for a particular team situation will depend primarily on the culture of the organisation. The more important consideration is whether ownership and commitment to the decision by the group is important. If the official philosophy is that of an enterprise valuing equality, then nearly everything will have to be decided in consensus, even if this results in major delays and drains the team's energies. As soon as the group has proceeded through a maturation process, as described in Section 4 below, it will be more able to deal with issuing mandates and delegating in such a way that consensus will only be required for strategic and fundamental decisions. This will leave operative decisions to be taken by majority vote or through delegation of authority to individual team members.

The decisive tests for the quality of decisions are the questions of acceptance. To what extent do the group members stand by the decision taken? Are they willing to defend it against any attacks by others? After all, in addition to the actual problem to be resolved, the issue of acceptance is the most important facet of overall teamwork quality; and, according to Vroom and Yetton (1973), this will depend on the degree and the style of participation encountered during the decision-making process.

### 3.5 External relations as potential for conflict

The relations between a team and its organisational setting can also contain many seeds of conflict. One important aspect is to specify the degree of participation of the team in defining itself against higher-ranking levels or other teams within the organisation. It is therefore worth considering degrees of participation by analogy with Tannenbaum and Schmidt (1958).

A supervisor is behaving in an authoritative or directive manner if he or she will only allow the team members to participate in a decision to a small extent. If the team's opinions are considered more seriously, the management style is termed consultative. A participative management style allows for



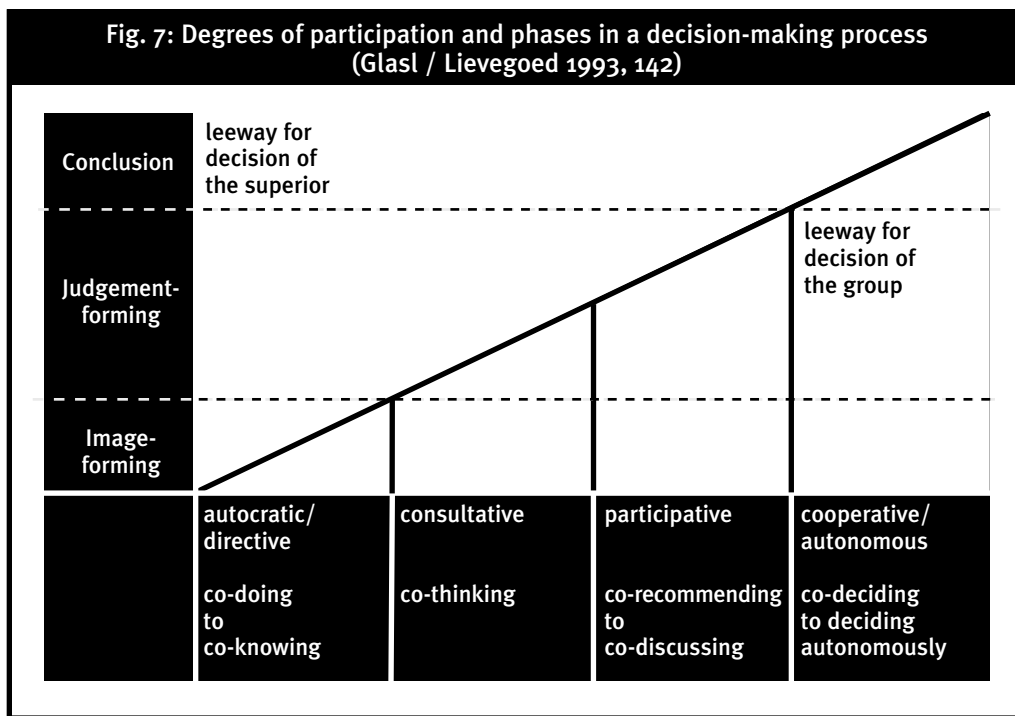
not only the voicing of opinions, but also a limited influence in the outcome of the decision. Finally, the cooperative management style grants the team overriding influence, or even complete autonomy.

Linking this graduated, mutual influence by the management and the team with phases 2 to 4 of the decision-making process set out in Fig. 7, results in a variety of forms. This is often described as ‚co-knowledge‘ or ‚co-decisions‘ in co-determination policy issues.

The team can ensure that its work will be harmonious and constructive to the extent that it succeeds in formally clarifying and defining tasks, areas of competence and responsibilities. This is especially relevant to higher- or equal-ranking teams within the same organisation. It is probably advisable to allow more time for this exercise at the start of the team effort, rather than risking the subsequent disappointment and disruption resulting from a lack of clarity. ‚Mopping up‘ invariably requires more time and effort on the part of all involved than would have been expended on prevention in the first place.

When a team seeks to communicate its interim or final results, it should do this in a manner consistent with the phased model for cognitive and decision processes. It should reflect accurately just how far the team has advanced in its efforts to identify a solution, especially in relation to the rest of the organisation. If, for instance, a project team has come to a conclusion before the rest of the organisation has even become aware of the problem, the presentation of the team’s findings is likely to meet with incomprehension and rejection: who needs a solution to a problem not yet perceived. Project teams would, therefore, be well advised to present step-by-step information as they progress, explaining the path that they are taking. This will assist in avoiding any ‚phase misfit‘ in the organisation.

Any problems that may be encountered at the psychosocial level between the team and its environment are unlikely to be solved so easily by the application of formal rules. As a result, competition and overt rivalry can easily ensue. Sometimes, the team itself may have contributed to the development of ‚hostile concepts‘ and to the eruption of open or covert struggles to form



coalitions. In such cases, teams should seek to apply the methods of conflict resolution proposed by Blake et al. (1964) to break down stereotypes.

In short, even a difference in culture between the development status of a team (Section 4) and the development phase of the rest of the organisation (Glasl 1994) can generate a strong potential for conflict. In this case, the team's development is an integral part of more comprehensive development in the organisation at large. For this reason, it might be fruitful to look briefly at the general dynamics of organisational development.

## 4. Development Phases of Teams

The phase model of group development described below is a variation on the Tuckman model (1965), expanded by Glasl (1996). Its distinguishing characteristic is the insight that describes the stage of development of a group as it moves through development phases, forms that can develop repeatedly as the dynamics of cooperation change in response to either external or internal factors (*see* Götz 1998).

The overview in Fig. 8 illustrates the four phases of a maturation and development process through which a team is likely to pass. Nevertheless, at any stage a team can unconsciously or deliberately decide not to proceed, choosing instead to revert to the preceding phase. Alternatively, the team may remain at a certain stage of development for a longer period, as changes in membership, turbulence in its environment or other circumstances inhibit further development of the group.

Awareness of these four development phases and of their various cultures and structures will enable a more systematic consideration of the team's social development status and thus allow it to take conscious decisions regarding its next steps. The model does not seek to describe any law of nature; neither should it be regarded as a prescriptive or normative set of rules. What it does instead is to point out risks and opportunities. It is of course always up to the relevant individuals within each group to decide how to take advantage of those opportunities or whether to move towards mitigating the risks.

**Fig. 8: The four development phases of teams according to Glasl**

1. Forming / Storming	2. Norming	3. Performing	4. Reforming
<p><b>A: Forming</b> Seeking contacts, scanning: What am I worth here? Orientation to external standards and symbols</p> <p><b>B: Storming</b> Pairing off, struggle for leadership, „fight and flight“ conquest games trying out role arrangements</p>	<p>Group draws up its own rules for success, decision-making, performance, influence</p> <p>Binding sanctions</p> <p>Leadership duo = „father“ role for authority and „mother“ role for securing the atmosphere</p> <p>Tension between rational top current and emotional undertow</p>	<p>Breaking up of stereotype roles/styles and clichés</p> <p>Role flexibility, leadership changes acc. to situation</p> <p>Learning partnerships</p> <p>Thinking-feeling-volition become explicit – geared to work objectives</p> <p>Balancing of performance-person-team</p>	<p>Self-structuring / self-renewal of the team: objectives, values, roles, structures are identified acc. to situation</p> <p>External relations are structured openly</p> <p>Ability to form and loosen relations</p> <p>creative constitution and dissolution of teams</p>

#### 4.1 Forming and Storming – finding and coming together

When a group comes together for the first time, there will always be uncertainties between the team members regarding both the work objective and the group situation. It is likely that a strong desire for security and clear orientation will dominate. Contacts are first established on an ‚ad hoc‘ basis and are characterised by a wait and see attitude. The group is explored and scanned. How should I see myself in comparison to the others? With whom can I best establish contact? How can I present or position myself most favourably? What is my potential value to the group? In answering these questions, the team members will orient themselves in terms of the external values and status symbols that they bring to the group from the external environment.

In this initial situation, comfortable, safe behaviour will prevail, although behaviour is likely to be strongly influenced by preconceived expectations of the group and its associated positive or negative images. These are a few of the most salient features of the group finding during the forming process.

Some team members, however, may instead choose to ‚grasp the bull by the horns‘. They will go on the offensive in order to overcome their uncertainty. The resulting situation is likely to be unstable for everyone and can alternate repeatedly between phases of harmony and periods of friction and tension.

As group members gain their initial bearings and are no longer strangers to one another, they will begin to reveal a bit more of their real self. They will act and react in a more personal manner. Their pleasure and displeasure, their wishes and desires will come to the fore. It will be increasingly important to them to assert their own interests and maintain their position. The result is likely to be a struggle for power and influence in the group: a ‚fight or flight‘. The authority of the formal group leader may also be questioned in the process, as the group passes through a period of ‚fermentation.‘ This storming is an integral component of the group-forming process.

The issue-related work of the team may be further affected by such disputes. In this phase, more energy is available for application to content-specific objectives. Just how the work is to be divided and organised, the manner in which decisions are to be taken, who is to check what, and to assume which tasks – all these questions are now discussed frankly and animatedly within the team.

It is also true that, although objective issues are discussed, there lies under the surface a struggle within the team concerning self-presentation and positions, as members seek to test or combat various forms of influence. In this process, they manage to establish who is to receive certain recognition, as well as to determine who is to fulfil specific roles or allocate them to others.

These various disputes tend in turn to produce renewed uncertainty, and to engender a feeling of mistrust among the different group members. This will lead to yet more security needs, needs that often find their satisfaction in the support offered by other team members sharing the same opinion (pairing off). Who thinks like I do? To whom do I feel linked? As a result, subgroups and cliques may develop.

These group disputes are conducted on a very personal level. As a by-product of these emotional encounters, the group develops its own sense of intimacy, thus creating its own history with shared emotional experiences.

Forming and storming, together, form the fundamentally unstable process of approximation, rebuff and re-formation, processes within which team members experiment with rank, roles and mutual relations.

## 4.2 Norming – creating one's own rules

In order to overcome the state of confrontation and friction, which inevitably develops from Phase 1, teams will make a number of minor and major decisions, especially as they attempt to clarify work procedures. The establishment of robust 'rules of the game' is essential if productive work is to be enabled. In this phase, a group will often fall back on norms and rules with which it has already experienced success in other group contexts.

At the level of issue-related work, the group finds that it is able to handle its terms of reference independently. It will devote considerable attention to the elaboration of proper procedures and work methods, and to securing them by means of sanctions. As a result, it will bring about internal peace and security.

At the psychosocial level, group members will now want to bring about good, rationally steered cooperation: consequently, they will refrain from engaging in competitive behaviour. The goal is to feel good in the group and to generate energy for the provision of inputs. Esteem, helpfulness, consideration and humour will now all take their places in the group. A we-feeling develops, reinforced by shared performance and experiences of success. The values, norms and rules of cooperation adapted from the external environment will form the core of an agreement culture with which all group members can identify.

Roles will be rationally clarified so that reasonable work processes can be drawn up for future tasks. Each team member will then be assigned appropriate roles in relation to the task to be accomplished. The focus moves towards issue-specific requirements; feelings of dissatisfaction will be regarded as a disturbance and consequently suppressed.

In any case these processes do not inevitably happen. They are tendencies and threats to look out for. Although this process will engender a certain short-lived stability, it is unlikely to develop further into the long-term. Thus, both motivation and work input levels of the individual members will decline. Performance will be adequate, but hardly outstanding. Although the group will work productively together at a certain level, it will be difficult to motivate it to achieve special inputs. This superficially congenial social behaviour will soon be established as an unshakable norm and will thus tend to conceal disagreements that have already formed beneath the surface. If such negative feelings are suppressed, the further development of the group will be severely inhibited.

In the long-term, the one-sided nature of this phase may well prove to be an impediment to the team's further development. As the objective comes to dominate, impersonal rules and mechanisms can make the team seem like a system in which the non-rational is afforded no place. This emphasis on objectivity may lead to both coolness and hardness in the team and force the more sentient aspects underground. A certain uneasiness can emerge. Some team members will demand more space for 'human elements' and thus risk triggering violent disputes about the meaning and limits of general rules. Others will ask for more freedom and individual responsibility. Still others will plead for even stricter rules and sanctions, fearing that as the emotional is revealed and addressed team task performance will suffer.

These tensions frequently lead to the emergence of a dual management system (Hofstätter 1957, 133ff). On the one hand, the team will recognise an issue-related and performance-driven 'father' figure who then takes on the responsibility for managing the performance tasks of the team. On the other hand, a 'mother' role is likely to develop: a team member who looks after the group's cohesion, working to foster a positive atmosphere and good interpersonal relations within the group. This second person is thus taking on a kind of counter-leadership. The proper functioning of these two roles will help to stabilise the performing phase of the team for a relatively long period.

As the second phase runs its course, the group members will have developed stereotypical images of one another based on behaviour routines, caricatures which can all too often get in the way of the development of actual personalities. Thus, team members see themselves as prisoners of role allocations imposed by the group. Tensions will increase between the rational ‚surface current‘ and the suppressed emotional ‚undertow‘. New conflicts and new storming are now on the agenda.

In this phase, the external relations of the team are also likely to be highly rigid and even marked by hostility. As it seeks to reinforce its own sense of self-worth, the group will erect boundaries around itself, effectively excluding any outsiders.

### 4.3 Performing and performance capability

As teams move into a third phase of development, their roles are clarified and brought further into line with their personal needs. In this process, they must work to render the stereotype images of Phase 2 explicit and then to break them down.

Between them, group members must work for clarification at the levels of thinking, feeling and volition. Here, they will express and approximate to varying concepts of satisfactory teamwork, share and coordinate their personal goals and intentions, and attempt to articulate a binding vision and shared value orientation. In addition, they will examine sources of sympathy and antipathy in their mutual relations, making behavioural agreements in order to defuse negative features. This will enable the group members to integrate the various facets of their personality with their work, rather than splitting them off. If a group succeeds in forming in this way, and in making its psychosocial level compatible, it will find that its work goals are met as well.

In this third phase, the group will also improve its procedural capabilities: it will work to find appropriate methods and techniques to accomplish its assigned tasks. Rather than relying on inviolable general agreements, the team will instead learn to combine flexibility with self-discipline. In this way, a more productive and humane atmosphere can develop, based on recognition and the constructive use of differences, conducive to an agreed learning partnership. The team will now radiate strength and find that it is able to work together at a higher level of performance.

Nevertheless, this phase also harbours a risk. Newly formed behaviour modes and newly established procedures may easily become rooted and inflexible in the long-term. To guard against this, teams must work concertedly to achieve role flexibility. They must strive to constantly adjust the roles and leadership contributions of the members, in order to react as situations change.

Leadership should therefore not be centred on any one person; instead, the team members will learn to carry out their work on the basis of individual responsibility and commitment, always recognising just where new initiatives and support are called for. Following the maxim of leadership changing according to the situation, they will themselves provide the necessary steering impulses. They will duly recognise that while it is of course essential that certain impulses are given, it is less important from whom they originate.

For this to succeed, the group must become proficient in ‚metacommunication‘: communication above and about the events taking place in the group and regarding perceived steps necessary to improve climate and performance. It must also practice ‚metalearning‘: the group must learn how it learns best and implement this insight by means of actions which will contribute to group development and performance enhancement.

At this point, team members will identify with the team and with its scope of tasks to the extent that they will apply their entire potential into the joint task. Work results will be optimised. The team will further structure its relations with outsiders, openly and with respect, even if it still

devotes its primary sympathy to the members of the group and continues to experience and intensively cultivate its we-feeling.

It is at this point that the team has matured to a level of authentic value-setting. The previous struggle between dependency and counter-dependency (according to Bennis and Shepard 1956) has become constructive „interdependency“. As they learn to judiciously apply various forms of external controls, the group members will have discovered ways and means to achieve the right balance between self-determination and external determination.

#### 4.4 Reforming – self-structuring and the ability to change

In the course of the previous three phases, the work group has learned how to harness the potential of its members to both optimise performance and enable its members to realise and develop their personal potential. These two objectives are not necessarily in themselves incompatible, rather the assignment of task capabilities and the personal development of the team members are inter-dependent team goals.

What is new in the reforming phase is that the group must learn to adapt and renew itself, a skill that will be practiced constantly and independently. In this process, it will come to understand the power of „dying and becoming“, as Goethe put it. They will recognise that both the work environment and the internal/personal life of the group are constantly changing as the team continues to take on both new tasks and members.

Many modern organisations have come to expect their staff to work in several project teams at once, without becoming hindered by role or loyalty conflicts. This requires not only continuous changes in, and of, the group, but also a developed ability to change. The fact that individual team members have become a part of a number of concurrent project teams should not be regarded as treason but rather taken as an essential part of the working environment.

If they are to react flexibly to situations, i.e. to truly become a team that learns from, and can effectively organise, its own development, team members must develop a capability to accurately perceive changes both within the team and in its external environment, and then to deal effectively with these. In practice, this will mean that the team will pass through several phases of uncertainty, as it constantly seeks to redefine the roles, rules and work goals that it has acquired in the individual phases of its previous group development. The group will learn to reconstitute itself in order to take on new tasks and will run through the phases of its development with this target in mind. In addition to this, it will come to accept the need to dissolve itself again after the task is achieved, letting go of old bonds, interest constellations or feelings.

Groups that prove capable of restructuring themselves and flexibly changing in this way will learn to handle this process autonomously. They will be able to renew themselves, always taking full account of the individual interests of the team members, the processes in the group and the requirements of the environment (especially the organisation and the customers). Only by mastering these skills can teams hope to work effectively within the many internal and external networks of modern organisations.

In summary, these four development phases will show certain characteristics during the progression:

- from superficiality and lack of commitment to depth and commitment;
- from unconscious external drivers to a conscious balance between external and self-steering;
- from struggles around unilateral dependency to a constructive handling of interdependency.



In his theory of group development, Bion (1961) primarily concentrated on the first steps of forming and storming; his work with short-term training groups focused on exploring this initial situation. From this, he came to see the constantly recurring risk of teams falling into regression. However, further research into task-related work groups has shown that, beyond this, teams can expect further stages of maturation. These will not necessarily develop automatically, rather they must be deliberately willed and the group must embark on the path towards them, thus participating actively in the learning and development process.

The description shows that there are various potentials for conflict in the individual development stages.

**In phase 1 of forming and storming:**

- team instability;
- a struggle for profiles and positions, as well as the formation of supportive coalitions: the team will show whether it is likely to revert regularly to these initial patterns, or whether it will instead venture to the next development phase. This will lead to significant differences in attitude about conflict.

**In phase 2 of norming:**

- too quick and inappropriate norming and rigidity;
- tension between the superficially rational ‚surface current‘ and the emotional undertow; leading to:
- conflicts between the roles of the dual leadership and their respective followers; or to
- efforts to do justice to the emotional dimension in group activities, while at the same time not compromising the rational, possibly preventing violent intervention by others: this is primarily achieved through even more norming;
- attempts to break out of tacitly accepted role assignments, and instead develop new role definitions: this is, however, likely to be resisted by other team members, who will instead seek to reinforce existing role arrangements through the application of sanctions;
- team friction, as the stereotypical images are increasingly regarded as restrictive and fixating, and therefore rejected.

**In phase 3 of performing:**

- whenever the team members come to identify the need for and thus propose different kinds of leadership and structuring initiatives; one member might wish to accelerate, for instance, while others will seek to slow down the process;
- whenever opinions differ as to the need for, and the effectiveness of, metacommunication: one team member might find ‚talking about talking‘ ineffective, while this process may for others be the beginning of some valuable in-depth communication;
- whenever team members exert moral and psychological pressure on others, imposing excessively high expectations and demands for social competence and thus triggering tension: the problem here is that these team members fail to recognise that it is unrealistic to expect the same contributions from the different group members since each of them will never be equal in strength;
- if, as a result of this, the initial enthusiasm for the group and for teamwork and the regard that individual members have for each other, turn, first, into effusive and excessive esteem and unreasonable demands, and then plunges the team into ‚negative hyperbole‘ after it experiences disappointments, ending in a vicious circle of self- and external denigration;
- work at the level of the 3rd development phase will regularly demand a high degree of mental activity,

creativity and willingness to accept responsibility: some team members may express a desire to make life easier by returning to the simple rules of norming, while other group members may resist this.

**In phase 4 of reforming:**

- the group members can exhibit differing degrees of patience for the essential group finding processes, and can apply pressure to make forming, storming and norming all lead to performing at less well developed stages;
- as team processes are constantly repeated, some team members can engage in routine apparent participation, behaviour which is experienced by the others as insincere and unsupportive, and thus irritating;
- the fundamental openness of the team towards its environment can become mentally tiring for individual group members, especially if it is accompanied by a general ‚desire for confluence‘: in other words, the individuality of the single group members becomes subsumed by the collective.

The most frequent source of tension in this phase lies in transition crises (*see* Wheelan 1990). Conflicts can arise simply because perceptions and wishes differ. ‚What phase are we in now – and in which direction do we want to develop in the near future? Which actions are necessary now, and which are perhaps premature? Must a certain phase be perfected and completed before we can move on to the next phase?

## 5. Team Development and Conflict Resolution

Our description of the potential for conflict that can arise at the five levels of teamwork and during the four development phases of a team has shown a wide variety of potential conflict sources. If appropriate methods of team development are properly applied at each of these individual points of conflict, team problems can be dealt with effectively both before and when they arise. Methods of team development can serve, at the same time, as methods of conflict prevention and conflict resolution.

For each specific situation, practitioners must initially reflect on the development status of the team:

- Who, if anyone, is having difficulties in the group?
- What issues in a dispute are perceived by which members?
- In what phase does the team appear to find itself at the present moment?
- Are the apparent tensions indicative of a development crisis in the team?
- Or are the problems of an individual group member exported into the group? Moreover, if that is the case, what responsibility does the team then have to tackle these problems?

Effective practitioners should also survey and analyse the desires and goals of the individual team members:

- How much energy is each member prepared to invest in team development?
- What are each person’s ideas as to how the team should further develop?
- Are these individual ideas and objectives mutually compatible? Are they contradictory? Do they perhaps reveal divergent assessments of the development status of the team?

Team development should not be regarded simply as an ‚off-the-job‘ activity, which takes place only at special times and in special places, as an interruption of routine work. Rather, both ‚near-the-job‘ and ‚on-the-job‘ measures are conceivable, as work is linked to reflection and ‚learning moments‘. Impulses for team development may even be produced ‚on-the-job‘ if teamwork

processes are regularly reviewed in the light of the five different levels of team activities. As a support to this kind of analysis, moderator and/or observer roles may be allocated on a rotating basis. This will allow each team member to serve as both observer and actor at various times during the life of the team. It is clear that a team can only become a learning system once it succeeds in closely linking work and learning.

Such team development can commence at any of the levels mentioned.

### 5.1 At the level of the individual group member

Practitioners can work to address each of the intra-psychological factors:

- freeing distorted individual perceptions by collecting individual pictures of the team, of its organisational surroundings, etc.;
- surveying existing thought patterns by means of questionnaires and then analysing these in the group or in partnerships, with the aim of breaking them down;
- raising feelings and attitudes to the conscious level by means of imaginative and artistic interventions;
- raising the sphere of volition from the sub- and semi-conscious to the reflectively conscious level, paying special attention to personal ideal and value concepts, and above all probing to see to what extent these are compatible with the team's overall objectives;
- using feedback methods to expose and reflect on individual behaviour patterns.

Usually, practitioners will find that they can conduct these experiments in conjunction with group interventions, whether that is within the complete group, in sub-groups or in learning partnerships. After all, an overall development of the team will only be possible to the extent that the team members themselves show development as well. Ideally, team development should lead to an overall enhancement of individual perception and diagnosis skill, conflict resolution capability and social competence. Active listening, the ability to empathise with others and to accept the validity of their opinions, is just as important as is the ability to express one's own feelings, intentions and opinions.

Effective conflict capability will also be conducive to cooperative behaviour and promote a willingness to enter into compromises. This is critical, as the performance capability of a team will in the end depend on the (overall) qualifications of its individual members. This must include not only technical skills, but also social capabilities and a competency for autonomy. Team members must develop the ability to consciously review their own thinking, feeling and volition, accepting responsibility for their experience of this, as well as for providing appropriate inputs into the group in line with particular situation requirements („be your own chairperson!“). This will require realistic self-assessment, accurate reflection on one's own capabilities, circumspection in conflict situations and a high level of frustration tolerance.

All this will in turn further team development. As we have shown, this development will move from one-sided dependence to interdependence, from externally controlled behaviour to effective self-determination and autonomy, from self-assertion in simple environments to the ability to master highly complex situations.

Depending on the particular team situation, the polarity between the individual and the team can be handled differently. If there are indications that various forms of group pressure have constrained individual scope for development, appropriate responses will require more activities that promote individual self-determination and self-definition. This will certainly be the case if the rational surface current in the group has dominated in the norming phase, to the point of oppression of the individual team members.

## 5.2 At the content-specific level/issue level

Here, practitioners are only likely to have success with methods that recognise the need for a multi-faceted and thorough discussion of the various points in dispute, in order to process issue topics constructively. As others have done, Eiseman (1978) has developed highly effective techniques for this context. By ‚dimensionalising points in dispute‘, practitioners can break down major themes into smaller sub-topics, revealing elements that can be discussed better and more concretely than could the large-scale generalisations. The Harvard School (Fisher et al. 1991) offers some tried and tested methods for achieving this in a negotiation setting.

Individual team members should further work to complement one another’s technical skills and expertise, continually learning from each other. Ideally, each member of the team will occupy several spheres of expertise. Finally, team members will find that consulting experts and specialists can be a good way of resolving issue-related differences.

## 5.3 The interaction level – psychosocial level

This is the typical point of leverage for most team development interventions. It is likely to include one or all of the following possible lines of approach:

- survey, reflect and deliberate on the *general group climate*, using, for instance, card surveys, questionnaires, painting and movement exercises: All these methods depend on the proper practice of giving feedback;
- survey the development status of the group, as described above: Temporary retraction of the authority of the leader and effective clarification of team decision-making processes can bring problems and conflicts to the surface more quickly, so that the group can begin to gain a greater understanding. These conflicts must, however, not be allowed to drag on to a point of escalation at which constructive conflict processing becomes very difficult. It can be helpful to apply the rule: ‚any disturbance of personal work capability must take precedence over continuation of issue-related work!‘ If the group culture properly respects this rule, blockages and disturbances will be the driving force for eliminating any difficulties in work performance, or with the methods and procedures applied, or in dealings with one another. In this way, conflicts become constructive helpmates and actually assist in bringing about the necessary improvements;
- make explicit and consciously structure the development of the *group culture*: Help groups to critically review their values and norms, to identify any inhibiting behavioural patterns and to implement specific measures designed to overcome these. If the group succeeds in jointly elaborating upon rules that are helpful for achieving the work goal and for cooperation within the group, this will represent an important step. It must be possible to express these new guiding principles in meaningful terms. They will not materialise automatically, but rather only take hold when behavioural habits change, including accustomed roles and natural privileges. Some ways to accomplish this have been suggested by the ‚U-Procedure‘ developed in 1970 by Glasl and Lemson (Glasl 1999, 155f), upon which are based the more recent methods of Scott-Morgan and Little (1994) for explaining the ‚secret rules of the game‘;
- depict the *group relations and roles* within the team through, for example, the application of ‚systemic lists‘, and the processing of problematic relation patterns using methods such as psychodrama: In order that groups may succeed in developing internal cohesion between the team members, unwritten role contracts which have developed subconsciously will need to be clarified, and relations reviewed. Many tensions and conflicts will need to be overcome, as a

healthy group dynamic can only develop from frank and respectful interchanges. Initially, these more emotional processes will be of greater importance for the group's development than the issue-related themes. Furthermore, mastering this part of the picture is an essential precondition for effective issue-related work;

- the „role-negotiation“ put forward by Roger Harrison (1971) has proved particularly helpful in this regard, and is also relatively easy to apply (see also Glasl 1999, 139ff): This approach encourages team members to openly voice wishes about how they would like to see changes in their team colleagues' behaviour. These requests are then presented mutually, explained and negotiated in a fair process of give and take. Later, the resulting agreements are reviewed in detail and amended.

We have already drawn attention to the various ways of describing the potentials for conflict, focusing especially on the need to clarify and overcome mutual stereotypical images. The methods of „perception clarification“ of Blake *et al.* (1964) are particularly useful in this regard (see Glasl 1999, 146ff). The concept is to ask the conflicting parties (individuals or sub-groups) to first record just how they have perceived the other party subjectively. They are then asked to present these views to one another. If they then find that their self-image deviates significantly from the picture presented to them by the other side, they must subsequently ask: ‚What can we have done to contribute to such a perception from the others? And what might we do ourselves to avoid causing such a negative image in future?‘ Explanations offered and conclusions drawn from this are then exchanged and discussed between the parties.

These descriptions of methodology can only serve as a very general indication of what can be done. Their proper application presupposes commensurate knowledge and experience and in most cases should be left to practitioners with adequate experience in team and organisational development.

#### 5.4 At the procedure – method level

Here many different kinds of intervention can be applied, as outlined in Section III (4). In general, it is advisable to link the work at the psychosocial level with method training for the procedural level.

#### 5.5 At the external relations level

Clarifying the tasks, areas of competence and scope of responsibility of the team vis-à-vis the rest of the organisation are recommended methods of conflict management at this level. Project management techniques have proven to be the best way of conducting this:

- developing methods for interactive design to facilitate the exchange of information within the team, and between the team and the rest of the organisation;
- drawing ‚pictures‘ of oneself and comparing these to the pictures offered by others, especially if relations between the teams are marked by antagonism: A good approach is the perception clarification method of Blake *et al.* (1964) discussed above.

#### 5.6 Continuous overview

Teams should also regularly review their work together and find ways of improvement, in an ongoing effort to raise the quality of both cooperation and work results. This can be done after each team meeting, as well as after the completion of projects. Closed team sessions can be effective for purposes of diagnosis and basic reflection.

If this type of review process is conducted systematically, team members will enter into the habit of observing the impact of their work even as they do it: they will observe these factors while at the same time working actively on their projects. Moreover, once team members have formed this habit of observing and self-reflection, they will also develop a different feeling of responsibility concerning issue-oriented work, method-related and psycho-process dynamics. All of which is an essential precondition for the self-development of teams.

Since the teamwork we have been discussing usually takes place in the context of a larger organisation, the success of team development can only be sustained if it is embedded in a more comprehensive process of organisational development.

If change is undertaken in this way, team development processes will be seen as a fundamental and effective prerequisite for autonomous development of organisations. In addition, this will not only serve to prevent conflict in teams and organisations, but also enable practitioners to make an important contribution to the effort of conflict resolution in the wider working world.

## 6. Conclusions and Open Questions

Work in teams can be significantly enhanced if teams and their leaders will participate actively in the process of recognising and naming team dynamics. To help them do this, practitioners (and team leaders) have put forward a number of basic tools that allow for rapid diagnosis of the strengths and weaknesses of each of the five key levels of team functioning, as well as of their influences on each other. These are the individual team member, the content or issues, interaction, methodologies and external relations.

Unfortunately, most training sessions and experiments in this domain neglect levels 1 (the individual team member) and level 4 (methodologies). Teams are then faced with and attempt to deal with conflicts at the level of interaction; problems that would have been better addressed at levels 1, 4 or 5. The result is an illegitimate ‚interactionisation‘ or ‚personification‘ of the conflict.

Recognising and dealing effectively with this is a primary challenge for practitioners, and they must be provided with user-friendly and reliable tools to accomplish the task. On the other hand, complicated, time and cost intensive instruments that can only realistically be employed by expertly trained psychologists will be of little use.

It is also critical that team members learn to use these user-friendly tools to properly assess the development status of their teams, as well as to make recommendations for future development. Unfortunately, many experts in varying schools of thought within this field of group dynamics continue to persist in performing this diagnostic work in an unstructured manner, relying mainly on specific experiences of the participants to anchor their recommendations. This may be conducive to the development of good empirical perceptions, but is, once again, of little use to everyday practitioners faced with conflict problems in teams. The result is a mystification effect, as the analysis of team development becomes a secret and inaccessible science for active team members and is therefore never even undertaken.

To help, we must now work to further develop systematically existing self-diagnostic tools such as that of Goetz (1998). Especially the interdependencies between teams and their related organisations must be examined and, in some cases, restructured. For this, analysts must come to understand not only the psychosocial dynamics of teams and organisations (the primary focus of most of the received systematic approaches), but also the mutually interdependent effects of the social subsystems of an organisation with its related cultural and techno-instrumental networks.

Failing this, we will be left with a reductionistic and, at best, an ineffective psychosocial approach.

The work to be done is by nature interdisciplinary, and must effectively integrate psychological, sociological, organisational and technical methods and insights.

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