

Diana Francis

*People, Peace and Power : Conflict Transformation in Action*  
(London: Pluto Press, 2002, 264pp.)

As the psychologist Ronald Fisher has written “One of the most serious global problems facing the world as it lurches into the new millennium is how to manage destructive and protracted conflict between groups with differing identities who are interacting within the same political system.”

Such conflict management needs skilled leadership within all organized segments of society. Diana Francis’ book is devoted to helping to develop such skilled leadership. “ The building of peace needs commitment at every level. Peaceful politics are possible only with willing consent and active engagement from all groups within a society. They require the formation of structures, the development of systems and the ongoing activity of people of all kinds, and those people need the vision, skills and cohesion of thought that make these activities and development possible. Since the maintenance of peaceful social and political relationships involves the constructive, non-violent handling of the conflicts that will inevitably arise, developing or maintaining the understanding and skills for this is a task for societies at any stage. Workshops can make a valuable contribution to the development of all these capacities and to rebuilding of relationships...”

“The focus of this book, therefore, is on the role of non-military, non-governmental actors who want to work for justice non-violently; to act as peace constituencies in situations of war or open political conflict; to become peace-builders in societies where violence, hatred, mistrust and antagonism have become the norm, where inter-communal relationships and structures are fractured or exclude certain groups, or where the rule of law and democratic processes have broken down.”

The emphasis of this book is on week-long workshops basically of two sorts: “capacity-building workshops” and “dialogue workshops”. Capacity-building aims to bring together people who are usually on the “same side” in a conflict — although there may be a good deal of difference and tensions even among people on the same side. The aim of such workshops is to sharpen skills so that individuals can take on a leadership role.

“Training is the most vital means of supporting effective organisation and action, by multiplying the numbers of people with the awareness and skills required to act judiciously and have an impact...The hoped-for result of such workshops is that participants will gain new kinds of awareness and frameworks for understanding different events and contexts, and an increased capacity for constructive action in different situations (particularly their own)... by enhancing participants’ capacity to think, analyse, observe, evaluate and make decisions, both over time and in a given moment, and their confidence that they have these capacities.”

The will to be a peacebuilder must be embodied in identifiable persons who understand the nature of the conflict but who, rather than building their power on an intensification of the conflict, are willing to lead strategies of cooperation. Such leaders need to build local “peace constituencies” while at the same time being able to be in close contact with national elites and international actors who may be able to help in the peace process. If a leader can activate a constituency for conflict, then leaders need to be found so that the “accommodation constituency” can also be activated.

It is obvious that peace leaders are not formed in a week's time. There must be pre-existing capacity and will. However, in a week, through work in a group, a person may be able to understand better his strengths and lacks and to see how to develop positive qualities further.

Increasingly, there are new styles of leadership. Peace needs visible peacemakers. While there must be some who work "behind the scenes", there must be some who are visibly "out front" or people will think that "no one is working for peace." However, a peacebuilder need not be constantly giving orders, but may be a "facilitator" — one who helps a group reach a common decision. The concept of leader as "facilitator" has emerged in the past two decades as traditional, hierarchical, military-like structures of organization and decision-making have slowly, often painfully, evolved toward more openness and flexibility, toward more shared responsibility for problem-solving, consensus decision-making and participatory management. A facilitator is someone who makes it easier for other people to accomplish a task or achieve a goal. Facilitators support other people; they do not exercise power over others. Rather, they use their skills of communication, observation and group problem-solving to empower others, to bring out the best in individuals and groups with whom they work.

These skills of peace leadership can be grouped into three:

- 1) the internal skills of self-awareness, what is often called "inner peace";
- 2) the skills of analysis, basically drawing a map of power relationships;
- 3) the skills of group networking and organization.

### 1 *Inner Peace*

As Bernard Mayer pointed out in his *The Dynamics of Conflict Resolution*, "People may derive power from a broad set of personal characteristics that they bring to bear in a conflict. Their intelligence, communication skills, physical stamina and strength, concentration, wit, perceptiveness, determination, empathy, and courage are key factors in determining how well their needs will be met in any conflict. Another factor is endurance. How long individuals can tolerate being in a conflict and how well they are able to withstand others' power is a key aspect of their own power."

As the peace researcher Johan Galtung has said "It is precisely during periods in our lives when we are exposed to a conflict that really challenges us, and that we finally are able to master, that we feel most alive." This inner vitality due to facing danger will have different effects on different people and will also change over time. For some, the exhilaration will lead to taking unnecessary risks or to an overestimation of one's ability to change the situation. For some there will be a momentary "high" followed by longer periods of depression. Thus, it is important for each person to know the impact of danger upon them and the ways to achieve a state of calm awareness.

To keep a clear focused attention in the middle of violence, hate, and confusion requires inner calm. There are techniques, often developed in spiritual training, to be able to stay calm and focused in times of confusion. There are also ways of developing an inner vitality so that one's vital energy is not drained away by the presence of hostile persons. Such techniques are usually related to increasing the flow of subtle energies within the body, techniques taught in yoga and traditions of meditation, in certain breathing exercises, and in the displacement of energy along the charkas.

In a more secular spirit, the International Committee of the Red Cross has been working on “stress reduction” techniques for Red Cross workers in tension situations.

## *2. Skills of Analysis*

The first and crucial analytical skill needed is the ability to understand the relative power and authority of the persons or groups involved in a conflict. Groups do not have equal power, and power can express itself in different ways. One must try to draw a map of power and inequality: Who gets what, when, where, and how ?

Drawing a power map requires a certain historical knowledge — how long have these patterns of power been in place? Are there signs of change? This skill of mapping changes in power over time is a skill akin to that of a geologist who must analyse a mountainside by looking at the visible strata. How old is this conflict? What have been the periods when much silt was deposited? When were the periods when little happened? By looking at these strata, where would one start to dig? How far can one dig before the whole section of the mountain falls? What is the best level of entry if one is to build a shelter in which all the parties can find a place to talk? What would be needed to modify the power position of the currently weaker? What means are those in positions of power willing to use to prevent a modification of power relations? What are the differences between the power structures in the rural and town settings?

Mapping power can be done by combining the personal life experience and perceptions of those in the workshop as well as brief investigations through observation of the area around where the meeting is held. One approach is related to an analysis of basic needs, such as food or housing. One can make a map of the several neighbourhoods in relation to type of housing or services, such as water, transportation, access to markets. What does the physical placement of houses tell us about power relations? Can these relations be changed by changing the housing?

A subtle analysis of power and power-holders gives some of the tools to break out of the confines of the current situation. We need to develop models that demonstrate different sources of power and their interaction and potential influence.

## *3. Skills of group networking and organization*

Of the interpersonal skills, communication is the most important. At the heart of both conflict and conflict resolution is communication. Conflict frequently escalates because people act on the assumption that they have communicated accurately when they have not. People can work on improving communication even in very intense conflicts. Communication is one of the greatest sources of both difficulty and hope in dealing with serious conflict. We need to improve our skills of communication through practice and self-analysis as we do in music, typing or sports which must become largely automatic action.

All human communication is multi-dimensional. All individuals convey meaning through what they say, how they say it, and what they do not say, through both verbal and non-verbal messages and through both emotional and rational components of their messages. As Bernard Mayer notes “Good communication requires focused energy. When people focus their attention, their energy, and their best listening and articulation skills on an exchange, others generally feel respected, even in the midst of conflict...Communicating clearly in

conflict takes courage. Delivering difficult messages powerfully, clearly, and at the same time respectfully is often a daunting challenge...Of course, good communication alone can not resolve deeply rooted problems if other conditions are not favourable. Communication is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for the resolution of complex conflicts.

In order to improve communication skills, one can draw upon the research of H. Gardner's *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences*. Gardner maintains that we can learn in many different ways and that certain people learn more easily in some ways than in others: movement intelligence as in dance and ritual; a visual-spatial intelligence as in art and environmental design; a verbal intelligence as in speaking and writing. Thus, it is important to develop one's speaking and writing skills, but also to see the possibilities of using art, music, theatre.

The use of computers and the internet are important new communication tools. One needs to find balance between face-to-face communications and connections with those far away.

The second type of workshop — dialogue workshops — bring together participants from different sides in a conflict and their primary focus is on the relationships between them and the conflict which divides them. The range of aims for dialogue workshops is quite wide, including breaking down stereotypes, broadening perspectives, developing common understandings and aspirations, and identifying possibilities for parallel or joint action.

Dialogue workshops or meetings, whose main purpose is to discuss the issues which are being contested in the conflict, are hard to arrange when there is a high level of inter-communal violence. The polarisation which is manifested in and intensified by fighting is accompanied by intimidation against 'collaboration' of any kind, or any attempts to dilute enemy images.

Moreover, there are people who have been so marginalized in the power structure over long periods of time that dialogue workshop organizers hardly consider involving them. "To work for conflict transformation at any level, therefore, involves ensuring that those who have been the subjects of structures of domination discover and develop the power to participate in what affects them. It means enacting democracy at all levels of public life: international, national, and local, working in ways that increase participation and help people in all sectors of society to find a voice."

One of the difficulties in dialogue workshops is to find the right level of depth at which to start the discussions — the "level of entry". As Bernard Mayer writes "All conflicts have many layers. If one starts off too deeply, one can get bogged down in philosophical discussions about the meaning of life. However, one can also get thrown off track by focusing on too superficial an issue on which there is relatively quick agreement. When such relatively quick agreement is followed by blockage on a more essential question, there can be a feeling of betrayal. This is why the mediator must probe the layers of the conflict, trying to estimate which ground is too soft and which too hard.

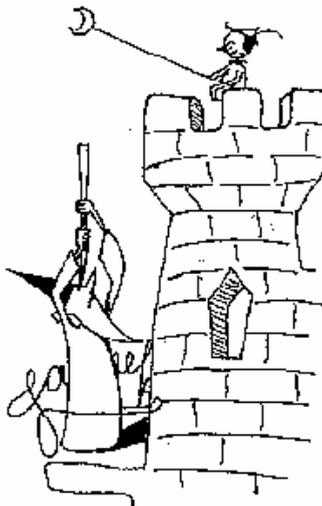
"The difficulties of finding the right point of entry is illustrated in the difficulties of the 'Oslo accords' between the Israelis and the Palestinians. The hard questions were to be left for last in the hope that earlier agreements would build an atmosphere of trust and cooperation which would allow the most difficult questions to be faced later. However, the earlier

agreements did not modify the daily lives of the people enough to create an irreversible wave of support for the 'peace process'. The earlier accords also did not modify enough the balance of power between the two sides so that the whole process was blocked when the most difficult 'final status' questions started to come up. It is true that often we must work on a conflict in a sequenced way because only through progress at a more accessible level can progress be made at a deeper level. However, an overall vision is necessary, and the knowledge of how one aspect of a conflict influences the other is important.”

A workshop is not a magic wand, capable of instant, do-it-all magic. It is a small contribution to educational processes that can support the transformation of attitudes and perceptions, resources and skills. Workshops function best when they are seen as part of ongoing programmes and relationships of cooperation for change.

All organizations need to look at how they are functioning and at their development, structures and processes. Also individuals need to deepen their understanding and skills to improve their effectiveness. This book by an experienced workshop facilitator is a useful guide to the organization of workshops and insights into group processes.

René Wadlow



Drawing: Janek Janowicz