

BALM 306 - CONFLICT MANAGEMENT & TRANSFORMATION

CONCEPTS AND METHODS OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND PEACE-BUILDING CONT'D

Story sharing: This involves telling one's personal experiences as well as listening to people from "the other side" of a conflict, it is identified as a central symbolic procedure to the broadening of the moral landscapes of those involved, and to challenge the traditional, established views of the conflict. Some important conditions for story sharing as well as certain dilemmas should be identified and discussed.

It is very important that these "stories" – combining confessions, mourning regeneration/repentance and apologies be told because it is psychologically and emotionally assuaging. Some stories will tell of obvious sufferings, such as those resulting from forced removals (from land, etc), killing of loved ones and other brutalities. Others will bring out the intense affront and feeling of, rejection that resulted to some social classifications. Others may recount how people were misled by empty promises, had their fears played upon, or were induced to act in ways they are now ashamed to admit. Such a process of self-discovery/self-outpouring and discovery of "the other" is considered a necessary basis for conflict resolution and entronement of lasting peace. We strongly believe this to be so because imaging oneself in the position of the other person (after hearing his/her pathetic story) could elicit and enhance empathy.

However, for story sharing to be effective, it is necessary to create what one might term, "safe space". It implies in the first instance physical safety – i.e. a space one could enter without fear of being killed or injured. Again, it entails psychological safety i.e. a space where one could speak about one's personal experiences without being interrupted, ridiculed or disputed. Furthermore, for the unofficial story sharing initiative, it also

means confidentiality (confidential space). Lack of this 'Safe space', could make people less confident and unable to express themselves and positions fully and/or listen to the other side "conscientiously".

Concept of Conflicts, its History and its Causes

This is a veritable strategy for peace initiative as it tends to focus on sharing experiences rather than merely debating or exchanging views about the conflict. Such idea of sizing up divergent views to a conflict can be a way of addressing sensitive issues. The inherent observations would raise questions of how to evaluate and integrate different views, and how much room there can be for dissent. It entails and points to the importance of fact finding, in order to be able to assess divergent statements, especially on controversial issues such as the kinds of deprivations, discrimination and abuse people have experienced.

These approaches would in no way devalue the various points of view, however, in the words of Ericson (2003), it calls for a "hermeneutics of suspicion in the form of an awareness of the position from which each person or group is speaking" Proper evaluation and/or hermeneutical interpretation of views and causes of conflict and the consequent exposure to the personal stories of people from "the other side", would no doubt, lead to a reevaluation of own's view. Something positive might result from such inner re-consideration.

Identifications and Loyalties

Reference to our common heritage in God and a commitment to it enhance willingness to dialogue and co-operation. In spite of ethnic, religious, socio-cultural or racial identifications and loyalties, initiatives for peace and conflict resolution could be hinged on and inspired by a religious

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faith which could be found in a commitment to the God of all peoples (rather than merely of one's own community or group) for instance, in a situation of conflict between Christians/Christian communities/groups, the "false God of Sectarian interest" would be rejected; and the stress would be on obedience to Christ which is far more important than all affiliations and/or loyalties. Faith in and obedience to God breaks barriers and creates a common ground that inspires a shared sense of belonging and oneness to one's own country or even to one's own local town.

So, the identification of commonality in God and a shared sense of loyalty to this command may symbolize a break with hostilities. This opinion is echoed by Tutu (1994) thus: "this unity would be based on a common humanity and a common nationhood with space for diversity of cultures, races, faith and languages .

He expressed this new shared identity in the notion of "The Rainbow People" (or the Rainbow People of God), a notion that had previously been invoked in the struggle against apartheid. Another metaphor could be found in the African notion of Ubuntu, referred to by Bonganjalo (1995) as a "shared existence within a radically inclusive community which welcomes the stranger" . The application of this notion, we believe, would reconstruct meaning and identity and make people to be ready to reach out to others.

Concept of Oneself and "of Other"

In a situation of conflict, there is usually a natural tendency to view "the other" as less civilized, legitimate targets for attack, terrorist or oppressors. This devalued view of one's "enemy" dehumanizes people, and tends to destroy empathy and sever the human bond between those in bitter

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conflict. A pointer to a better illustration of this claim could be seen in a vivid assertion by Krog (1999) that:

In South Africa, there was the notion that a black person is not quite a person in the same way as a white person, not having the same emotional and physical needs

In a situation like this, there is hardly a way in which a white could appreciate the life of the blacks or imagine himself in their position.

There is therefore an urgent need for those on mediation (particularly religious persons/groups) to prioritize, as a “potent tool”, initiatives for reconciliation which are based upon the notion of common humanity, which for Christians, is motivated by the idea of all people being created in the image of God.

Ericson (2001) informs us that “in Northern Ireland, the reconciliation groups focus on overcoming segregation by providing space for encounters across the Catholic Protestant divide

He attests that he found “numerous testimonies from participants who had discovered the humanity of and established friendships with people from “the other side”

It goes then to support the view that the notion of ‘common humanity’ could build relationship across racial, social, cultural and religious divides, and this has much to do with discovering each other as fellow human beings which also entails waking up from attitudes illustrated by the quotation from Krong. Personal encounters should therefore, be facilitated by those on mediation. It is essential, even with your worst enemy, to find out what is causing the problems that make them your enemy. Personal interaction would do the magic.

Tracks/Methods/and Styles: Approaches to Peace Building

So far, we have endeavoured to highlight and discuss some conceptual terms as keys and working tools for those on mediation towards conflict resolution and/or management. We intend here to highlight also what may be considered as styles, tracks or methods of handling conflicts. These may include:

Avoidance: This style of resolution is seen when one or two of the parties are advised to avoid one another, avoid talking about the issue at conflict. This avoidance style can be a very useful, constructive resolution tool, when words between individuals may become so heated that a period of avoiding one another could lead to reducing the intensity of the conflict; and by avoidance, the individuals could think more clearly and possibly come together in a more friendly way after their feelings have settled down. The saga between Abram and his nephew Lot in Genesis chapter 13:1 – 13 is a very useful illustration in this regard. The physical combat and attendant tragedy that would have ensued between the servants of Abram and Lot was wisely and timely avoided by Abram's counsel for separation between the feuding servants over pasture land.

So when individuals become locked up into such strong conflict that physical violence is a possibility, it is helpful that these people avoid each other for a period of time or if possible even permanently. This undoubtedly may leave some hostile feelings. This we know; however, it is believed that it does preserve the physical health of those concerned. Again, if the persons involved have come to continually clash on matters because of their personality or socio-cultural differences; it is more constructive for them to avoid working together, rather than continually

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slowing things down by their personality and ideological clashes. The two most common types of avoidance are: Denial or withdrawal, and suppression or smoothing over.