CHAPTER 9.

THE RESULTS OF THE WORKSHOP

1. Re-entry and Follow-up

With the workshop completed, the representatives of the parties return to whatever their home organizations may be, and the panellists go back to their overdue correspondence, their piles of unread books and papers, their irritated students. As far as the practical procedures involved in the mounting of a single workshop rather than the first of a planned series are concerned, the main part of the job is complete.

But in the academic debate over problem solving and the use of analytical workshops, now two or three decades old, there has been much worry about what happens next. Critics ask: What about the 're-entry' problem? Will not the homecoming party representatives bum out in the abrasive political atmosphere of the continuing conflict situation 'back home' ? Inevitably, the atmosphere that he or she must re-enter is going to be highly charged. There is the friction of fear, the inflammatory suspicion that 'their representative' is no longer theirs. There will almost certainly be perception that participants have been the subject of skilled third-party manipulation.

There are a number of ways of minimizing this 're-entry problem', but the most effective involves the basic nature of the return itself, for the returning participant should not be the bearer of implausibly good tidings. There should be no claim that all can be resolved by the contents of the signed piece of paper triumphantly brought back from 'the negotiations'. Often, there are few 'good tidings', save for the reassurance that there are, indeed, people, on 'the other side' with whom it might be possible to discuss underlying issues further - and in a not wholly unreasonable fashion.

Equally often, there is no piece of paper, although sometimes workshops have produced agreed lists of principles on which a solution might be based, or notes about future options, or about types of future action that it might be helpful to avoid.

Hopefully, participants return cold and sober, as enhanced realists. They know with greater clarity the nature of the situation that their parties mutually confront. For at least one reason, they are likely to be welcome, for they have gathered 'intelligence' - the most valuable intelligence that a party in conflict could conceivably possess in such a dangerous and uncertain relationship. Workshop participants have had a glimpse of the future. And so have their opposite numbers, across on the other side.

It is, of course, not just one future but several alternative futures. What a successful workshop should have achieved is to show which of these are impossible, which are disastrous, which are barely tolerable, which are the ones to work towards. Among them, the choice is there for the parties to make. What a successful workshop has demonstrated is that the parties do have a choice. They are not trapped by fate. They can take control of their own future.

In taking control, the returning party representatives can have a crucial role to play. To some degree, they can replay, within the decision-making procedures of their own party, the role played by the panellists within the workshop - asking questions, drawing out implications and emphasizing costs and risks. However, there is a major difference. Participants are taking sides, knowing where they want their party to go. And they have the arguments to back up their case, learned from the best possible source - the representatives of the opposing party, who have available exactly the same arguments to use in the councils of their own organization.

This is not to argue that participants face an easy task on their return, nor that some steps might not be taken at the workshop to ease the mutual problems they are likely to confront at 're-entry'. Indeed, as we have discussed briefly in Chapter 8, in the final stages of many workshops it is possible to observe participants mentally preparing for the return home as they realize that they must shortly give an account of the meeting, the discussions and their part in them. In the final period of many workshops there are signs of rhetoric returning, behaviour becoming more intransigent, stereotypes reappearing, and stances reverting to the hardline, 'official' positions of the first days of the process.

To a large degree, this 'preparing for re-entry' stage can be anticipated and defused by the panel's ability to provide an analysis of the stages of the workshop process itself, to reassure participants that they confront a normal phenomenon, and to use its appearance as a way of leading into the question of what the adversaries round the table might be able to do (or, sometimes, not do) in order to ease each other's return home to 'politics as usual' and 'conflict as normal'.

The answer to this question is clearly dependent upon the relative success of the workshop and the nature of the 'output' that participants might be taking home with them. But specific understandings may be less valuable than a sense of reassurance about the possibility of reaching some mutually acceptable solution in the future; a deeper appreciation of the goals, constraints and obstacles faced by the other side; and an awareness of a range of mutually acceptable parameters within which a future solution might be sought.

In a few cases some more definite output may have been developed. This could involve a framework of mutually agreeable principles for some settlement, a list of suggested tension reducing or mutually reassuring measures, a number of possible formulae for dissolving an impasse, or a proposal for a process which official discussions could begin.

Particularly in this last case, a final task for participants in workshop might well be to discuss and agree what might be done to make each other's task easier in taking the workshop's output home to decision-makers who are inevitably cautious, usually skeptical and sometimes downright dismissive. They will have to be convinced of the realism of analysis undertaken at a workshop of which they have not been part, and persuaded to accept the utility of the ideas or options emerging from it. To some degree, this last discussion of how achieve these goals can be a test of the success of the workshop. If participants can co-operate in helping to ease each other's return, then it is an indicator that they have achieved:

(1)   a measure of ability to start empathizing with some of constraints faced by decision-makers within their adversary, and
(2)   a degree of trust that enables them to consider mutual ways overcoming some of those anticipated constraints and difficulties.

At the very least, some agreement should be possible about who are appropriate recipients of the workshop's outputs on both sides, and about the maintenance of confidentiality outside those agreed recipients, even if this can only be for a mutually acceptable time period. Nothing destroys any positive effects from a workshop in building trust more effectively than rapid, public revelations about the holding of a workshop, about the participants, about the workshop's agenda and about its outcome - particularly if these are released with a partisan slant to claim credit, or to pre-empt or undermine others' claims for credit.

In addition, there is often an inclination on the part of those attending a successful and stimulating workshop to want to announce that success, frequently for positive symbolic reasons. They may wish to show that mutually beneficial contacts are possible, for example, or to indicate that hopeful alternatives to continuing coercion, damage and destruction might exist. But experience suggests that public announcements should be avoided, and the commitment to confidentiality with which the overall process began should be maintained and reinforced by at least a tacit agreement at the end of the workshop to continue to maintain confidentiality. This is particularly significant if further workshops are planned or possible.

At a more positive level, the closing stage of the workshop can involve participants in a discussion of helpful ways in which the other side's representatives might be aided in presenting the workshop output on their return. There can be discussions about which types of action or statement should be avoided for some time after return. Conversely, positive future acts by participants might be discussed, and optimum modes of presentation of workshop output agreed. Paradoxically, it may help one side if the other emphasizes the 'realistic' nature of the discussions and the committed, but not utterly unreasonable, stance of the adversary. Awareness of the opposition's true stance and commitment can often assist representatives in making a credible case for new ideas and future options to their own decision-makers.

In the longer term, participants might also discuss the start of symbolic 'bridge-building' activity, such as the production of analytical papers or journal articles that make use of new insights gained or possible options developed during discussions; the establishment of new organizations to pursue other forms of mutually beneficial interaction across existing divisions and cleavages; or simply the maintenance of a channel of communication between workshop participants, once all have returned to their home bases. The main point, however, is to spend some time at the end of the workshop during which participants think together about the problems presented by one another's return to the reality of the conflict 'back home'; and how they might assist each other in overcoming such problems, even if the problems simply take the form of a body of pressmen and a phalanx of television cameras waiting at the airports of both capitals.

SEE EXERCISE 9.1

2. Outcome and Assessment

The consultants will also be observing the re-entry of the participants with some concern. Even the most successful workshop is ultimately pointless if the insights gained from the interactions on site cannot be successfully and credibly transmitted to decision-makers within the adversary parties. Unfortunately, consultants are limited in the support they can provide to returning participants in the tough discussions that follow the latters' return to the scene of the conflict. Immediately following the workshop, it can be helpful for consultants to communicate with those decision-makers who originally authorized participants' attendance, commenting on the success of the workshop and outlining in general terms its achievements, if these are mutually agreed by workshop participants. The matter of producing a summary Report for limited circulation needs to be discussed before participants leave and, if one is desired, a first draft of this should be sent to

participants for their comments as soon as practical. Follow-up visits both to participants and to their formal officials can be a valuable part of the overall process, and can play a major role in maintaining the credibility of the exercise, of the organization undertaking it, and of any output from the workshop. Finally, consultants should be prepared to continue to act as a trusted channel of communication among workshop participants, reinforcing and continuing the sense of having shared a unique and useful experience, and possibly preparing the ground for further meetings, either in the second of a workshop series or more informally in other settings.

The consultants face another equally daunting task, however. This is to assess what effect the workshop or the overall problem solving exercise has actually had on the conflict it was designed to help resolve. Tracing through the results of a problem-solving exercise is always difficult. In principle, of course, it is no more and no less difficult than tracing through the effects of any form of intervention - diplomatic, economic, military - into a complex system of parties, relationships and interactions. To the diplomat's question 'How do you know your workshop has had any effect on this conflict?', the consultant's justifiable answer is 'In much the same way that you know that your diplomatic initiative has had an effect !' But there is a shortage of benchmarks. So far, there are few, if any, examples of a problem-solving exercise that has, on its own, produced a resolution of a complex and protracted conflict. The most optimistic consultants will only claim, at best, to have made a 'major contribution' to particular peace processes. Evaluation is a matter of explaining and measuring that contribution. Tracing through the impact of an exercise, or of a particular workshop, is, therefore, a challenge but it is an integral and necessary part of the overall problem-solving process. Consultants cannot and should not avoid a retrospective evaluation of their work.

At its simplest, evaluating the impact of a problem-solving exercise involves consultants in two questions. Firstly, they need to ask about the types of change they need to observe to be able to claim that their input has had any effect on the conflict they seek to resolve. Secondly, they need to ask about the methods by which appropriate data might best be gathered. There are obvious difficulties in answering both questions, given the principle of confidentiality enshrined in the problem-solving method itself and the resultant constraints on record keeping, follow-up data gathering and the availability of evidence about sensitive and politically dangerous matters. However, consultants cannot escape this final task of assessing effects, if they are to improve the practice of analytical problem solving and develop its underlying theory beyond the level of being an untestable and overly optimistic hunch.

In assessing the effects of an exercise from the point of view of the nature of any change it brings about, we have found it helpful to distinguish three levels of change that might, or might not result from a problem-solving exercise (see Mitchell, 1993 for a discussion of these three 'levels'). A successful exercise will therefore need to involve some follow-up studies of changes:

(1) In the workshop participants (the impact)
(2) From the workshop itself (the output)
(3) In the behaviour of and relationship between the parties (the outcome).

At all three levels, consultants are involved in a process of carrying out what might colloquially be called a 'before and after' assessment. At the participant level, the *impact* of the workshop involves the issue of whether, and to what extent, participants have changed their perceptions of the conflict in which they are engaged, of the adversaries, of potential outcomes, and of options for future activity. In the case of the workshop's *output*, what has changed is the existence of some material or intellectual 'product' (a list of principles, a draft of suggested confidence-building measures), which did not exist before the workshop. At the level of the conflict itself, the *outcome* of the workshop might be indicated by some change of tactics or strategy by one or both parties, by a change in the rhetoric used by leaders, by the use of new concepts or ideas in statements by leaders, by the actual use of familiar (to participants) reassurances or tension-reducing measures, or official adoption of agreements, formulae or statements of principles developed during a workshop.

The availability of means to carry out such assessments varies considerably and some are, indeed, constrained by the nature of the problem-solving approach. Consultants undertaking an exercise are, by definition, dealing with sensitive issues and sensitive parties, the latter being particularly and rightly resistant to being treated as the subject of some quasi-scientific study. They are in a situation involving danger, destruction and often death and are understandably resentful of anyone using those costly and often tragic circumstances to carry out research.

However, we have found that it is possible to carry out assessments of the effects of problem solving, particularly if this is built into the overall process, and the consultants present it as a necessary part of improving the service of consultancy and the quality of future problem-solving efforts.

In past cases, assessing the impact of a workshop on participants has often been successfully carried out by asking for subsequent feedback. This can be gathered in follow-up conversations on what participants feel they have learned that is useful from being part of problem-solving exercises; from more structured interviews; from subsequent conferences focused on the utility of problem solving; and, in certain

cases, from being able to administer surveys and questionnaires following a workshop or even more rarely, both before and after the workshop experience.

SEE EXERCISE 9.2

Delineating the output from a problem-solving workshop is an easier matter, although the need to keep such products confidential militates against much comparative assessment of problem-solving exercises carried out in different conflicts, or even in the same conflict over a period of time. Put simply, the workshop either results in a product or not. Many do not, in which case the consultants are left with the difficult task of trying to link the impact on participants directly with the workshop's effects on the conflict itself, the latter being by far the most difficult level to assess. However, even at the level of an output it is important for consultants to build in a process of review and assessment at the end of each workshop, and again at the end of a complete exercise. This is often easier said than done, given that it is often difficult, practically, to involve busy panel members in any assessment of 'what went on' in a workshop, what effects it had, and what the overall output of the workshop (intellectual rather than practical) was likely to have been. However, in the past we have been able to build in various review processes as part of a problem-solving exercise, and found that some combination of the following might be used fruitfully:

(1)   The appointment of a project or workshop 'historian' to observe and evaluate the course of the enterprise, turning points , changes and effective change processes.
(2)   The holding of review sessions at the end of each day's interaction, together with a longer evaluation session once the workshop has come to a close.
(3)   The prior provision of clear and specific criteria to identify significant changes in both participant behaviour and workshop interaction during the period of the workshop.
(4)   Requests that all panel members submit evaluations of the workshop, once they have had time to reflect on the experience and assess its short term impact. This can be done individually or according to some standardized set of questions that focuses attention on what the consultants hypothesize to be key aspects of the process.
(5)   Follow-up conversations, or standard interviews, with participants, once they have returned safely to their homes and have had time to reflect on their experiences in the workshop and on the results of their re-entry into the ongoing conflict.

Methods similar to the last should be used to try to trace through the effects of the workshop on the conflict itself. It is obviously the case that workshop impacts or outputs can only have an effect on the subsequent course of the conflict if they have some effects on the parties' decision-making processes. This means that the task of the consultants at this level is to try to trace through the impact, or lack of impact, via interviews, wherever possible with decision-makers.

Objective methods of scholarship can also be used, foremost among them being a close empirical analysis of the course of the conflict immediately after the exercise. In our experience, dramatic changes seldom occur, so one must look for indicators such as changes in the tone of public statements, the easing of restrictions, the adoption of new labels and concepts, the utilization of ideas or suggestions, or the gradual, public adoption of principles. These are typical of the indicators of success that most workshops produce. Public acknowledgements by leaders or statesmen' as in the case of the Oslo Process in 1993, are likely to be as rare as Nobel Peace Prizes, so alternative evidence of workshop effects must be sought and the course of the conflict closely monitored for signs and indications, which will inevitably be small. Perhaps many years later it will prove possible to retrace one's steps with those directly involved at the official level and see whether a problem-solving exercise held twenty years ago did, indeed, have the impact that was hoped.

SEE EXERCISE 9.3

3. Workshop Series and 'Continuing' Workshops

All of the above tasks associated with re-entry and evaluation attend each problem-solving workshop, whether it occurs as a single, isolated event or as part of a linked set. However, being or becoming part of a series of workshops does add to the list of tasks to be carried out at the end of each meeting.

If the participants' interest and enthusiasm have been aroused, there may be suggestions to repeat the workshop soon, or after certain turning-points in the relations between the adversaries have been achieved (a truce, or an electoral agreement, for example). In such circumstances, agreement in principle needs to be reached about whether to hold another workshop or not and, if so, when, where, and for what purposes. Follow-up activities must be agreed and co-ordinated, at least at the minimal level of permitting the third party to explore the possibilities of another workshop once the results of the first have been evaluated.

Issues of the expansion of membership must be raised, at least in a preliminary fashion. In some recent workshops, participants have proved wary of including other stakeholders or representatives of other parties in subsequent meetings, in spite of the obvious relevance of the latter to hopes for any lasting solution. It is almost as though participants recognize the fragile nature of the trust engendered between them, and are frightened that the introduction of 'new members', who have not been through the 'bridgebuilding' experiences of the initial meeting, will wreck their hardwon ability to talk openly and safely about the conflict, and their own goals, aspirations, obstacles and viable options. Consultants will need to take such sensibilities into account when pressing the idea of expanding the membership of the next workshop in a developing series. They will also need to be patient and to urge patience on others, when the inevitable delays arise in arranging another meeting.

Similar difficulties attend the re-entry and follow-up processes in 'continuing' workshops, which also present their own particular practical and logistical problems at the end of each successful meeting. For example, it often proves difficult to assemble exactly the same set of participants at meetings held at long intervals, even though their presence has the advantage of ensuring that it is not necessary to repeat the processes of venting and trust-building that are characteristic of the early stages of workshops when participants are unfamiliar to one another. In the same way, the introduction of new participants, or voices from an increased number of parties, can be particularly tricky in continuing workshops. It may be necessary to create preliminary agreements that such a change is acceptable, and to build consensus around the processes for deciding if and when it should occur. Finally, there is always the chance that a continuing workshop might see some of its participants become involved in more formal or official interactions part way through the exercise. Ironically, the more successful a workshop, the more likely this is, but it poses significant problems of mixing levels and procedures for the overall peace process, and it may require individual participants to play incompatible roles.

4. Planning for the Future of Collaborative Problem Solving

Whatever the difficulties, it seems clear that the chances of having a significant effect on any complex, protracted conflicts are likely to be greatly increased by problem-solving exercises that go beyond a single workshop, and involve either an open-ended series or a continuing sequence, meeting over a planned time period. Inevitably, it will also be the case that problems of assessing the results of both the components of the series and the overall exercise are themselves multiplied. Arrangements for making an evaluation of impact, outputs and, above all, outcome will have to be carefully considered and planned before the initial workshop, with a built-in expectation that they will need to be modified in the light of experience.

However, it is becoming increasingly apparent that the use of exercises involving multiple workshops, despite the attendant problems of complexity, will be the most likely development of problem-solving approaches, given that their main focus is on efforts to resolve or, at least, ameliorate violent, protracted and deep-rooted conflicts. The problem-solving approach is not a simple package deal, something to be done just once with a single set of participants and then forgotten. It has to be a complex and sustained process. In any one 'conflict' there are many issues, many parties and many levels. There are internal disputants and there are usually external interveners with their own complicating agendas. At the grass-roots, there are collections of weary people struggling; at the level of high politics there are desperate groups battling out the tough decision-making inevitable in violent and protracted conflict.

For all of these reasons, work involving the planning, carrying through and evaluation of problem-solving exercises will clearly continue into the future. Protracted conflicts and violence are never absent from human society, and it is NOT the case that consultants using and advocating problem-solving approaches hold that it is ever possible wholly to abolish or resolve human conflict. Their shared belief is merely that many individual conflicts can be ameliorated and some (many of those otherwise judged intractable or insoluble) can be resolved and the adversaries' relationship transformed by using this approach.

The further development, testing and refining of collaborative problem-solving exercises and workshop methods is ultimately the most valuable follow-up of any individual problem-solving exercise, and one worthy of the amount of time, effort and resources it will inevitably involve. The present Handbook, therefore, merely represents an interim account of a changing and developing practice and it should be used tentatively. Moreover, readers should be cautioned not to regard this as the final word on how to conduct problem-solving exercises, nor should they imagine that, having read the Handbook and undertaken the exercises, that they are now qualified to go off and intervene in the deep-rooted conflicts in Chicago, or in Colombia or in Darfur. In these and all other cases, caution, sensitivity and experience are necessary and the last can only be gained by becoming part of some institution that has an established practice and a track record of using collaborative, applied, problem-solving techniques.

In spite of such cautions, however, a problemsolving approach, whether using workshops, facilitated dialogues, interactive consultations or any other structured process, offers great hope for the future. It can

help parties enmeshed in protracted and violent conflict devise acceptable and durable solutions to what might otherwise seem wholly intractable situations, totally resistant to more conventional approaches.

Hopefully, this interim account has indicated how this currently unconventional process might contribute to the resolution of even the most intractable, protracted, and seemingly hopeless conflict. It will need to be wholly re-written in a few years' time, but that, surely, will be an indication of the success of this approach.

Exercise 9.1: Preparing for Return and 'Re-entry'.

Background Discussion.

At the end of each and every workshop there is a tendency for participants to become a little uneasy at the prospect of returning 'home', an uneasiness that may be compounded by the fact that they are carrying back some innovative and hence threatening ideas, or even a draft document suggesting some new options or strategies.

One last task for the panel may, therefore, be to devote a session to what participants intend to do on their return, and what might be done to help one another through the 're-entry' process. This may be unnecessary, but at least the matter has to be raised and discussed. The problem may be minimal (e.g. How to deal with the media?) but, again, it needs to be raised. It may prove a significant problem for one or even both sets of representatives, in which case serious discussions and probably some commitments need to be worked out before the workshop finally disperses.

Exercise Scenario

It is the sixth and final day of the first Zandian workshop, and, after much debate and discussion of the actual wording of the provisions in the facilitator's draft document, both Zandian and ALF participants are more or less happy with the principles for settlement outlined in a 'Consultants' Draft' - now entitled somewhat grandiosely 'A Vision for Future Peace and Tranquillity in a United Zandia'!

During the discussions of this document, and what to do with it, it has become increasingly apparent that some participants - especially on the Zandian government side - have been becoming more and more worried about the idea of taking such a document back to Zandia with them, and what will be done with it when they get there. Moreover, all the participants seem worried about what the other side will do, on their return, and what the implications of allowing them to take a workshop document back with them might be.

Gradually, a number of themes have emerged in the discussion, involving underlying worries such as:

(1) Should anyone take any document back at all ?
(2) If so, should it be this draft of principles for a settlement or something else - and, if so, what ?
(3) If we decide to take this particular piece of paper back, how can we minimize our vulnerability to criticism (and even danger) when we unveil it ?
(4) Who should we agree to unveil it to, and how?
(5) What must we try to insist the others do - and don't do - when *they* get back, and how can we be sure they will do what they say they will ?
(6) Can the consultants help in any of this ?
(7) How did we get into this mess, anyway ?

Alternative Background Scenario

For the purposes of this exercise, assume that the discussions held in your workshop have, after a great deal of hard work and compromise on everyone's part, finally arrived at some common agreements of principle OR a list of suggested tension-reducing measures that involve simultaneous unilateral actions including a one-month truce (its renewal contingent on the opening of formal 'talks about talks').

Everyone has taken relatively clear notes about what has been agreed under a number of broad headings and has checked that all have a shared understanding of what the notes actually say and mean. It is clear from this process that some participants appear to have agreed to a suggested scheme that involves their party in rather more 'concessions' than the other side, but the former have agreed to go along with the process on the assurance that fresh advantages will become obvious to them and to their leaders once the process is under way.

One question that now arises concerns the final form which these agreements in principle might take when they are taken back from the talks, which we will assume have remained confidential at least as far as the details of issues discussed are concerned to the leaders and constituents of the various parties.

Exercise Task

YOU are a member of the facilitating panel for the workshop OR of one of the two teams of participants representing the conflicting parties.

The panel have requested participants to retire to their teams to work on the above set of problems and to present suggestions for re-entry arrangements to the full workshop, which will re-convene when all teams are ready with their final drafts of the document and with some suggestions about its most effective use. All three groups (panel and participants) are working on this matter.

It is of prime importance to work on ideas for the safe and trouble-free re-entry of all participants to their own parties. Getting any new ideas accepted will be difficult, so you need to produce a scheme that will involve some mutually supportive moves by each set of participants to help the others:

(1) Re-legitimize their original participation in the talks.
(2) Sell the idea of a framework for a settlement and a new, short-term relationship, given that all parties have their intransigent opponents of compromise, and their hardline supporters.
(3) Get any draft document accepted and acted upon.

In the two groups of adversaries, it is especially important to consider not only the difficulties one's own participants are likely to encounter on re-entry, and how to deal with these at each stage of the re-entry process, but also the likely difficulties of the others and how such difficulties might be minimized by one's own future actions and those of the entire set of participants.

Members of the facilitating panel need to consider ideas whereby all parties' representatives can be helped to re-enter successfully and have a draft document, which will inevitably be unpopular in some circles, supported by enough key people so that it can be acted upon and followed up.

What are needed, therefore, are some ideas (1) about ways of helping each other to legitimize the agreements reached with their own constituents and (2) about tacit or explicit agreements among participants and third parties concerning ‚safety procedures' in the event of the re-entry process taking a significantly negative turn.

Produce a list of suggestions.

Exercise 9.2: Assessing the Effects of the Workshop.

Background Discussion.

Academics and others who conduct problem-solving exercises are constantly being criticized by their colleagues for their 'secrecy', even though this is necessitated by guarantees of confidentiality usually given to participants; and their lack of ‚scientific rigour', in that there is no way that anyone else can check up on claims that this workshop or that exercise has had some important effects directly on the workshop participants and indirectly on the conflict itself.

There is some justification for such criticisms, particularly as those conducting problem-solving exercises usually do claim that they have had an effect (usually positive) on those who have participated, at the very least.

In the early days, workshop organizers, facilitators and observers tended to get away with personal observations of what went on as the workshop progressed, how participants' behaviour and statements changed during the week or so of the workshop, and what kinds of relationships developed between and within groups of adversaries. More recently, however, efforts have been made to evaluate the impact of workshops more systematically and to provide some data to answer the question: What did the workshop achieve? This has to be done with care and tact, however, as people in protracted, intense conflicts usually object, quite rightly, to 'being experimented on' or 'being the subject of some academic game'.

Still, the question remains of how can one tell the effect the workshop has had on those participating (the facilitating panel as well as the participants); and how one can assess the impact of a workshop with any degree of accuracy.

Exercise Scenario

YOU are members of the small team of observers and support staff that has been assisting a team of facilitators conduct a fiveday workshop (the first, it is hoped, of a series) on a protracted civil strife in the African country of Zandia. It has been an interesting if somewhat noisy week, towards the end of which the participants seemed to be listening more carefully to what their adversaries said, and to be making the occasional constructive suggestion about some confidence-building measures that might be tried in the interval before the next workshop, planned to involve top advisers to the two rival leaders.

At the very beginning of the week, the then leading facilitator asked participants if they would mind if, at the end of the workshop, the organizers administered some questionnaires to 'get your reactions to the workshop and its processes ... and to see how you felt about it, what you learned from it, etc. etc. The participants agreed and at this morning's session, the penultimate morning meeting, the lead facilitator reminded them again of this commitment to general acceptance (rather reluctant in a couple of individual cases).

Your panel of facilitators is a rather diverse one, including an anthropologist, a social psychologist and an expert on Organizational Development, who has had a great deal of experience with National Training Laboratories (NTL) approaches and is interested in group dynamics. The other two members are an experienced facilitator from the Institute for Informal Diplomacy, who has worked on many African conflicts in the past, and a political scientist interested in 'discourse analysis', who has made several references to 'the social construction of meaning' and linguistic 'codes' at work in the week-long dialogue. You are not too sure what this means.

There was a brief discussion of the form the questionnaire might take at the first planning meeting before the workshop started, and some obvious disagreements among the panel of facilitators about its focus, form and purpose, let alone the possible negative effects of '... forcing our guests to indulge in this task ...' as someone remarked at the time. However, there has been nothing since that first discussion.

Exercise Task

The facilitating panel has asked you, as part of the team of administrators and observers, to provide some alternative models for 'an evaluative questionnaire', and a draft of the kind of questionnaire that you favour, given the current state of the workshop and 'the sensitivities of the participants' none of whom are too familiar with western-style opinion gathering.

You will probably need to defend and justify your choice of evaluative instrument to one or two members of the panel.

Write a short memorandum to the panel, outlining the options, explaining your selection of a particular type of instrument for this exercise, and attaching a draft questionnaire.

Exercise 9.3: Evaluating the Outcome of the Workshop.

Background Discussion.

One of the most challenging questions faced by scholar-practitioners conducting CAPS exercises is: 'So what did it all accomplish?' -although this same query is often put more bluntly: 'Did this resolve, or help to resolve, the conflict?'

In the early days of the development of collaborative analytical problem-solving, tracing through the effects of a workshop, or a series of dialogues, was often carried out in a very *ad hoc* manner, with little effort to be systematic or rigorous. Contacts were maintained with participants, follow-up visits made to the various countries or communities involved in the conflict, and efforts made to discern changes of tone, aspiration or strategic direction in what leaders of parties in conflict said or did. Sometimes proposals not unlike those developed in a workshop were forthcoming. On other occasions, phrases or concepts, apparently from the workshops, found their way into the public dialogue surrounding the dispute. On yet other occasions, 'effects' took the form of requests for further meetings or workshops, sometimes with an expanded membership.

However, as the use of informal problem-solving exercises, facilitated dialogues, open ended discussions, etc. grows and develops, one of the essential tasks, forming part of the overall design for the exercise, is to put in place some means of tracking the impact of the exercise on the conflict itself, quite apart from any effect it might have on the individual participants or the panel of facilitators. Sometimes the effects are easy to see, as when new organizations are established within the conflicting parties, led by or containing prominent members of the workshop. More often, given the confidential nature of an exercise, the effects are less obvious, involving changes of rhetoric -which may themselves be fleeting, as subsequent events combine to alter or negate any effects the workshop might have - or the floating of some official 'trial balloon' by one party to see whether the other is as serious about starting some formal dialogue such as might have been suggested at the workshop.

Whatever the anticipated or hoped-for effects, those organizing the exercise must be prepared to follow-up the meetings with the best possible procedure for tracing through the effects of the meetings and for identifying the factors that either help the workshop 'output' have a major impact (for example, what helps to ease the 're-entry' problem for participants); or place major obstacles in the way of the exercise having any effect at all. A tentative process for evaluating the outcome of the exercise needs to be planned, preferably well in advance of the workshop, and checked out with the participants for their approval and subsequent help. Only if this is done, and effects traced through and - if possible - documented, can claims about 'success' be made with any confidence.

Exercise Scenario

YOU have been asked to undertake the role of 'exercise historian' for the first of what the organizers hope will be a series of meetings on the continuing conflict in Etruria, although it is clear that some participants have, over the last few days, been worried about their presence at the discussions, given the provisions of the Alva Accord, and that this concern may prevent a repetition of such a CAPS exercise.

Apart from the occasional acrimonious outburst, threat to walk out and the efforts of a constitutional lawyer to read to everyone long extracts from a wide variety of European constitutions, the exercise seems to have gone reasonably well. Some participants have seemed to listen more closely to 'the other side', and there have been fewer set speeches 'for the record' as the week progressed. The last two days have been devoted to a discussion, 'purely speculative, of course' in the words of one prominent government supporter, of possible 'exits' from the current situation of irregular violence, stalemate, isolation and lack of communication between the adversaries (although participants representing the views of progovernment parties have resolutely turned down the idea that any deal might be struck with the guerilla group, POME, even in the longer term).

Most recently, participants have been discussing possible 'confidence-building measures', and have even allowed a list of these, based upon the suggestions originally recorded on newsprint, to be typed up by workshop support staff. At the end of the meeting, however, these lists, having been scrutinized and discussed, were ostentatiously left lying on the conference table, following a reminder by one participant that 'There is no point in taking such a document away from a wholly unofficial meeting!'

However, at the very last session of the workshop, participants have expressed the general feeling that the CAPS exercise had been 'useful', and that they had learned some new things from the dialogue. Moreover, they agreed to pass on the new insights they had gained over the last week, although 'We cannot guarantee that any significant changes can take place', as one participant remarked; and to suggest that another workshop might be convened to discuss the issue of 'exits' - or 'As you scholars say, "processes for moving towards a resolution of the conflict"…' in two or three months. One of the facilitators has commented that it seems likely that this will depend upon this workshop having some effects during the interim period, which, he suspects, will be somewhat longer than the three months everyone is talking about.

Exercise Task

During the planning period preceding the CAPS workshop, it was vaguely mentioned that part of the task of the exercise historians' team would be to put forward some ideas for a follow-up and evaluation process once the workshop was over. You have not paid much attention to this suggestion.

However, at the all-day debriefing session after the formal ending of the workshop, a clear expectation emerged that the historians would shortly produce some ideas for evaluating the effects of the workshop on the Etrurian conflict, both in the immediate aftermath of the exercise and in the longer term. It has been casually remarked that 'the funders' are looking for some evidence that the workshop has been a 'success' before deciding whether or not to renew support for the whole CAPS series on Etruria.

During the debriefing, various suggestions have been put forward, involving the need to arrange follow-up visits and interviews (when, how often, asking about what? you have said to yourself); the requirement for 'close monitoring of the situation in Etruria' (by whom, looking for what?); and, even, the development of 'indicators of change' that might help to identify 'impacts on various dimensions - political, military, social' (this last from an economist sitting on the panel of facilitators). All of these suggestions have been vague in the extreme.

What was not vague was a request from the three core facilitators that you should draft out some 'detailed ideas' for a follow-up procedure to 'evaluate the overall impact of the workshop' in Etruria, and present a scheme at the follow-up meeting of the CAPS team, due to be held in seven days' time. 'Nothing too elaborate, we don't have the money,' explains one of the core facilitators, 'but I'm sure you can come up with something fairly rigorous and academically respectable. Let me know if I can help.'

Produce a draft evaluation scheme.