

Social Inclusion in Action: Oslo, November 2005

During the first teaching days of the project Social Inclusion in Action, we focused on presenting a few central ideas concerning dynamics around majority and minority issues, as well as how conflict can be transformed into community building. These ideas were also brought into practice.

The participants were from eight participating organizations and six countries:

1. ANNWIN - Center for Support and Development of Human Potential (Slovakia)
2. Arendal Centre for Adult Education, Arendal Municipality (Norway)
3. Caritas of Katowice Archdiocese, Center for Disabled "Divine Mercy" (Poland)
4. The European Initiatives Office Ltd. (Poland)
5. European Multicultural Foundation (UK)
6. The Folk Culture Association (Norway) - project coordinator
7. Folk High School of Ajdovščina (Slovenia)
8. Lithuanian Ethnic Minorities Association (Lithuania)

Particularly because this was not just a one-off seminar, but a part of a longer term project in which the group will be meeting again, we recognized the privilege and responsibility this group has. It is an opportunity to take to heart the task of learning about and contributing to matters of social inclusion in Europe. We reminded the group that the issues of building multi-cultural societies were not 'out there', but also within the group. The kinds of issues we meet in our communities as we strive to build multi-cultural societies, are issues present in our own group. The group began to appreciate the inherent issues and also conflicts within our group, and also appreciate its richness of diversity, in respect to country where people were living, ethnic and cultural background, languages, religions, physical health. ability and disability, gender, sexual orientation, economic situations, education, as well as the kinds of work people are doing and their personal qualities.

Over the two days, in morning and afternoon sessions, we touched on some of the key ideas relevant to deepening dialogue and working with essential and contentious issues around social inclusion in our societies. These ideas are based in our approach of Process Work, developed by Dr. Arnold Mindell and colleagues, and our experience in many groups, organizations, communities and countries, working with these issues internationally. After the presentation of some ideas, there was discussion, followed by more in-depth group interaction around particular themes. This sometimes involved the whole group, and sometimes involved a sub-group working in the center. We also had occasion for small groups to meet and talk together.

Below is a brief summary of :

- A. Issues that the group focused on in its discussion and group process and
- B. Ideas and methods presented

A. Issues the group focused on included:

: **1. Translation and awareness of language,** as an important issue of social inclusion.

2. Issues facing people who are disabled: We looked at attitudes that have oppressed disabled people in the past, and still currently. Individuals with disabilities spoke personally. The

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legacy of communism came up, in regard to how people with disabilities were locked away in institutions and in their homes. Some spoke about how this terrible legacy has left some disabled people frightened to accept outreach and services. We looked at the 'ghost' of this attitude, as it still persists in society – and not only in former communist countries, but around the world. We also saw and felt the kinds of attitudes that can make a difference. In the group present, we saw the ability to stand up against this ghost, and speak about and demonstrate the importance of passion and heart towards one another.

3. Issues facing refugees, asylum seekers and immigrants: Starting as an exploration about an issue within a participant's organization, and how you talk to people who are closed to including immigrant groups - we looked at dynamics around how people are included or excluded from organizations and society. We looked at a polarization of roles: On one side, there is the viewpoint that there needs to be an openness and outreach to refugees and asylum seekers, and to other immigrants. On the other side was the viewpoint "It is not our job". "It is not our problem".

The first role supported a multi-cultural society, and suggested that diversity of culture contributes to society. The opposing role's point of view was that 'Immigrants take away from us' and "If you do come to our country, you need to adapt, learn the language and our cultural rules first, before you will feel accepted". In this more nationalist view, it is culture and language, if not ethnicity, that defines participation

The discussion revolved first around the specific dynamics in an organization, then within the broader society of Norway and indeed globally, and included an interaction with a participant who was an immigrant to Norway who felt unwelcome there. (A further discussion touched on the differentiation between refugees or asylum seekers without a home, and those who are immigrants for economic or other reasons).

4. Attitudes influencing the relationship between 'East' and 'West' in Europe: The group brought up the issue of East-West relationships in Europe. We raised questions about the meaning of identity of East and West. It was uncomfortable for many to consider how one identifies as East or West, and several people spoke about not wanting to choose to identify with one or the other. Yet the question of identity brought out important discussions and issues that are present in the background. Some of the issues that came up included :

-- '**You are less than us**' People from Eastern and Central Europe experience an attitude from the 'west' that says "You are less than us" . "You come to take advantage of our wealth and we have no intention of losing our wealth, so we don't want you here" Or, "We want you here to do the kinds of jobs that our people won't do'.

-- '**We are not so sure we want to be a part of the 'west'** '. People expressed mixed feelings of wanting to be part of the EU, and wanting economic improvement, but not necessarily wanting to adopt 'western' attitudes and 'western' culture.

-- An important aspect of our meeting was that individual participants from the UK were all from India and Pakistan. **And we touched on this paradox, and the meaning of this East-West polarity at a global level.**

-- In respect to the polarization of East-West in Europe, the individual participants from the UK looked at how they identified as part of the West, with privileges associated with the UK- as well as how Asians in the UK continue to be marginalized after many years. **Asian people who are British, or living in the UK, continue to experience prejudice**, and are considered outsiders, even after many years of living, working, and contributing to the society.

B. Approach, ideas and methods presented:

Below is a synopsis of some of the concepts and methods presented. References and suggested reading are included below.

We looked at :

1. **Social inclusion as a political, social, psychological and spiritual practice**
2. **The concept of deep democracy**
3. **Facilitation and eldership**
4. **Basic concepts and methods in conflict facilitation**
5. **'The Rank Business'**

1. Social inclusion is a political, social, psychological and spiritual practice. It involves political legislation, social work and education, relationship and inner work

2. Deep Democracy: A community is wise and conflicts can transform through facilitating an interaction of all points of view, including those points of view that may be considered marginal, irrational or unimportant.

3. Facilitation: We are thinking of this group as **facilitators:** interested in furthering communication around social inclusion.

Eldership, developing as a facilitator: Not only age related. This refers to an interest in the well-being of the community. It means the ability to take a stand, but also the ability to welcome all parts, out of interest in the community's wholeness and sustainability.

Inner Diversity: Welcoming all points of view is in part dependent on knowing your inner diversity – knowing the different parts of yourself. This helps to:

- know how you are a part of the conflict
- to be in the river and on the bank of the river

Conflict: We all need patterns for recognizing it is possible to go into conflict, and to come through it, that conflict can transform, that community and relationships can come out intact, with deeper relationships and contact with one another.

Burning Wood: Getting to know your emotions and how you can be moved by them, having compassion for your own and your family's story of oppression or perhaps where you have caused oppression in others. This process allows you to really work with issues of building a multi-cultural society, and to facilitate yourself and others. By 'burning your wood', it does not fuel and perpetuate conflict, but helps you to fulfill it.

Feeling at home and making others feel at home: This is a political, social, psychological and spiritual matter of privileges and associated rank. (See also 'The Rank Business' below)

Political: Do you have basic human rights? A government who will give basic protection, rather than having to fear being killed by your government? Do you have shelter and enough to eat? Does your community give you a message that you are important? Or, that you are less important? Do you have a sub-culture where you belong?

Social: Feeling at home is also related to our social privileges based on society's attitudes towards one's culture, color, gender, sexual orientation, religion, class, physical or sensory ability, health, education, etc. More social privileges may make you feel 'at home', whereas fewer social privileges may make you feel 'outside'. Where you have social privileges, you tend not to notice them. You think it's just normal, and may be unconscious of how others do not share your privileges.

Psychological and Spiritual: A deeper sense of feeling 'at home' results from being centered, knowing oneself well, a sense of belonging to a sub-group or culture, or being in contact with a spiritual source.

4. Conflict resolution

A. Concepts:

Field: An underlying unifying field – also with polarizations

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Atmosphere: One way to begin to perceive the field, is through sensing the atmosphere (tension, warmth, depression, etc) within a neighborhood, community or group.

Roles: Roles reflect a particular tendency or point of view.

Polarization of Roles: Roles may appear as opposing points of view.

Role is bigger than an individual. And an individual is bigger than a role :

That means that a role is more than an individual point of view. It is a 'time spirit' a wider point of view that needs many of us to express it. And an individual is more than just one role – an individual has all sides within herself.

Ghost Roles: A ghost role is implicit, but no one is identifying with it, or assuming accountability for it. (For example, when everyone is innocent, the ghost role may be one who did it. Or when everyone is righteous in a battle, the ghost role may be the one who suffers the conflict) .

Edges: Limits of identity and communication, governed by a belief system.

Hot Spots: Points of communication where things escalate, and doorways to transformation

Cycling Conflict: Flip- flopping between roles

B. Methods:

Bring awareness into the interaction, rather than only falling into it – this is the key to conflict facilitation.

We touched on these methods and will be returning to them in the following seminars :

- **Inviting the themes** relevant to the group
- **Making a consensus or noticing the group's consensus**, regarding what it is focusing on.
- **Represent the viewpoints and notice where there is a polarization of roles.** By representing each view as fully as possible and facilitating an interaction between views, communication can deepen.
- **Bring in majority and minority views**, including an unpopular or least represented view.
- **Notice Ghost roles and represent them.** These are positions that are implied but not being represented directly.
- **Bring awareness to Rank dynamics** and use awareness of rank dynamics to explore the emotions involved in the situation, and questions of accountability.

Additional methods:

- **Talk to the 'we' about 'the not we'**,
- **The 'third party' is here.** The outside person or group being spoken about refers to something that is present and relevant to the communication dynamics among those present. (We did not discuss this directly, but will do so in the upcoming seminars).
- **The past or future are always present.** People tend to dissociate from an existing situation by referring to the past or future. Past issues of injustice are often the fuel of conflict until they are addressed in the here and now.
- **Bring awareness to high and low dreams:** High dreams are our highest ideals, and our low dreams have to do with the moods we fall into, such as hopelessness, when our high dreams are not fulfilled. (We did not discuss this directly in the seminar, but will do so, in the upcoming seminars.)

5. Rank Business (Rank is defined as the sum of all privileges an individual has, conscious or unconscious, individually acquired or inherited):
It is a huge and important thing to make legislation to support diverse and multicultural societies. It needs to be followed up by the actual practice of social inclusion.

Some dynamics:

Lack of awareness of rank dynamics perpetuates conflict. One of the blocks to social inclusion is insufficient awareness of rank dynamics. Building multi-cultural societies is not simply a matter of recognizing and respecting differences. It involves recognizing what dominates and what gets marginalized, historically and currently. Rank in itself is not the problem; it is the unconscious use of the privileges that make for conflict.

Social Rank: Social rank refers to our relative social privileges based on things like the color of our skin, ethnic/ cultural background, religion, country or government, economic situation or class, education, gender, sexual orientation, health, physical ability, age, and more.

Psychological or Spiritual Rank: Psychological rank refers to our relative privileges based on being supported internally, or from knowing oneself well. Spiritual rank refers to the sense of well-being or ease that arises from being in contact with a spiritual source. Someone with lower social rank may have a very high spiritual or psychological rank.

Hierarchical or Positional Rank: Rank based on job position

Contextual Rank: Rank dynamics are relative to the context you are in

Rank dynamics are complex: One may have lower social rank, because of gender or physical disability, for example, but higher social rank because of job position, etc.

Prejudice and Power: There is a difference between prejudice (which we all have), and the power to enforce your prejudice. All of us tend to be most unconscious of the areas that we have privilege and so use it, not knowing its effect and impact on others.

Responsibility versus Guilt, enjoying and using your privilege: Having privileges or rank is not the problem. Being unconscious of it and not recognizing where others do not share your privileges is a problem. Recognizing that one has rank does not imply that you should feel guilty for it. Guilt is rarely useful to anyone. But, awareness of privilege, enjoying it, and using it for the benefit of others, is possible!

Examples of unconscious rank dynamics you will recognize: Even though it is complex, here are some simple guidelines to help you become aware of how *unconscious rank dynamics* manifest:

1. The person with lower social rank tries to say: 'I have a problem with you – Take it seriously'. The one with the higher social rank will usually say, 'Its not my problem'
2. The one with lower social rank will say 'A change is needed'. The one with higher social rank will usually say, 'You have to fit in'.
3. The one with lower social rank may become upset and emotional and may feel as if she or he is going crazy, and the one with higher social rank will seem unconcerned, cool and collected.
4. The one with lower rank will have lots of self-doubt, and the one with higher social rank will assume that she or he is right and never question her or his own actions. (Over time, the one with lower social rank becomes righteous, too)
5. The one with higher social rank is usually not aware of dynamics of rank - but thinks his or her attitude is just the 'norm'. Those in the minority position or lower rank are usually very aware of rank dynamics, because they feel hurt, irritated, humiliated, frustrated, or enraged as a result.
6. The one with higher social rank will often say they don't understand what the issue is or why such a fuss is being made, while the one with lower social rank may be constantly thinking about the issue.
7. In the minority position with lower social rank, you may be afraid to speak, because it could threaten you – you may lose something you need to survive, lose your job, be arrested, shut out of a situation you need, or killed. The one with higher rank feels free to speak, assumes the right to speak, and almost nothing will threaten or touch his or her position.
8. With higher rank, you tend to determine the style of communication either intentionally or by assuming what is appropriate. You also determine if and how available you are to

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relate, and the time and place. While in the lower rank, you tend to feel you have to adapt to the dominant communication style and the other's availability.

More rank signals: Communication styles are of course cultural as well as personal, and rank dynamics are complex according to the context. You can observe rank signals in almost all situations of daily life and across cultures, though they will vary between cultures:

1. Taking physical space in a way that assumes it is yours is a signal of unconscious higher social rank. Feeling constricted in use of space can be a signal of lower rank.
2. Leaning back and acting disinterested or superior is a signal of unconscious high rank, and being concerned for doing the right thing can be a signal of lower rank.
3. Assuming that a rational style of communication must dominate may be a signal of unconscious higher rank, along with switching to a style that suits you, or that you presume is 'appropriate'. Feeling un-free to speak, or having a quiet or emotional style of communicating may be a signal of lower social rank.

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