



conflict

What an Opportunity!

COME – Conflict ManagEment for Actors in EVS Projects

*Jolana Dočkalová, Magda Jakubowska,
Tomáš Pešek, Aleksandar Weisner*

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Participants in the COME TC, Czech Republic, 2008

Acknowledgements

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So far, already five NAs from different countries have hosted COME TCs in which 132 participants from 26 countries have participated.

Foreword

The booklet "Conflict – What an Opportunity!", which was published by the Czech National Agency for the European Commission's Youth in Action Programme, is the result of the common efforts of the Czech National Agency and the COME training team.

In recent years, so many things have been increasing in EVS (number of countries involved in volunteer projects; more and more young people interested or participating; more and more organizations of different kinds organising projects; and, of course, more and more projects and local beneficiaries). All of these mean that people from very different cultures across the world, with different habits, beliefs and values, will travel more and more, further from their cities and countries, not only to meet other people, but to work together, to learn from each other, and to share responsibilities related to personal and local development. And they will do that not only as individuals, but as part of a collective as well. Fortunately, the volunteers are not alone in that process. They receive support and help from mentors, coordinators, project managers, NA officers, and other volunteers in handling and managing many different types of situations: *unemployment, homelessness, loneliness, hunger, etc.* But each EVS actor needs *skills, knowledge* and *support* to be successful. And that is what the COME TC is all about.

The COME (CONflict ManagEMENT for Actors in EVS Projects) concept of training courses, as such, was developed during the '03/'04 Training of Trainers for the EU Youth Programme. The COME training course has a purpose to encourage and support different EVS actors to "drive" through conflicts and handle them in a way that leads to development and not destructive relationships between people. And not "only" that. What we work on in COME is, in fact, raising the quality of EVS and preventing conflict.

After participating in the training course, it will be useful to have at home, or in the office, some kind of reminder, something to support one's new experience and a kind of checklist for practicing new skills and knowledge. To keep nice memories as well. And that is the purpose of the booklet "Conflict – What an Opportunity!" For that reason, we strongly believe that the booklet is a compatible and logical addition to the training course and will provide long-range effects related to the course's results. The training course and the booklet are designed for people working directly with volunteers as a coordinator (supervisor) or mentor (tutor) in EVS projects in host organizations.

The booklet itself follows the concept and content of the training course.

Both concept and content were developed during the previous COME training courses. Since the year 2004, we have organised them six times, in different countries – the Czech Republic, Poland, Slovakia, Luxembourg and Turkey. And we are preparing more of them. Over 130 participants from 26 countries have participated in COME with the following objectives:

- To improve competences in analyzing and dealing with conflict;
- To raise awareness of the possible reasons for conflict in EVS projects;
- To further develop an understanding of the cultural differences of EVS project participants;
- To clarify the roles of all EVS project partners (SO, HO, volunteer, NA), primarily focusing on the rights and responsibilities of the coordinators and mentors;
- To share experience in EVS projects;
- To explore new EVS features under Youth in Action.

Introduction

Where there are people, there are differences; where there are differences, there is conflict. As long as people feel, think and respond differently, the potential for conflict will exist. Since the world population is growing and people are travelling and meeting each other more often than ever before, the possibilities to face different needs, values and wishes, etc. are increasing. Whenever individuals, groups or societies want to achieve incompatible goals, there is tension, stress and conflict. Do we need some social skills and knowledge, some competences in communication to face the challenge? Does some different perception, habit, attitude, interest, etc. make us richer, or more afraid? How do we ensure that mutual influences, in spite of different needs and desires, will bring us a common positive experience and development? Can all sides of a conflict enjoy progress, or is it a question of power and violence?

Fruitful or painful?

Among people, there are many commonalities as well. Every society has conflicts; in every society, people use violence and behave destructively; in every society, every attack produces a victim or victims.

What are our common and universal experiences and knowledge about conflict? Let's take a quiz:

1. Conflict can escalate. Once the process of escalation has started, it is difficult to stop.

True

False

2. Every side in a conflict will try to justify the way they behave.

True

False

3. The further a conflict has gone, the more the objective problem (the issue) will be pushed into the background.

True

False

4. The more force the sides are using, the more pain is created. The defend-attack circle feeds itself.

True

False

5. Something will be damaged (a plate, nose or heart).

True

False

6. All parties in the conflict have to accept the consequences and the responsibility.

True

False

7. Damage is not necessary. We can learn how to use conflict for sustainable development and to everyone's satisfaction.

COME

False

Tickling the beast

How do we understand conflict? As a complex and integral part of human existence, a crucial and natural catalyst for social change. In every conflict we can identify the parties involved, how the conflict has developed, and what the consequences are.

There is extensive literature on conflict transformation/management/regulation, with a wide diversity of approaches and theories. And a lot of divisions and classifications. The intention of "Conflict – What an Opportunity!" is not to present and explain all of them, but to compile the most relevant, with a focus on EVS actors' unique conditions and demands. The basic approach to the topic is capacity-building. The COME team concentrates on increasing the understanding of conflict and developing skills for peaceful and constructive transformation. The booklet and the training course are ways to offer a model and not to insist that this is the only right way or to create a "how-to" prescription.

The main elements of the training course and booklet are: Conflict Management, Intercultural Learning and EVS Management. For each of them, the team will use different theories of exploration, but always from the "dealing with conflict" point of view.

In the case of EVS Management, we were inspired by Johan Galtung's *structural theory*. This theory will help us to realise how issues such as roles and responsibilities, division of tasks, and clarification of roles are important. (Johan Galtung calls this a subject-action-object relationship.) A better understanding of conflict's roots and ourselves in conflict we find in theories about *social-psychological development* and *basic human needs theory*. We also believe that theories based on human behaviour have a special relevance in the field of communication, conflicts of interests, values and needs, and intercultural learning (images, perceptions, identity, stereotyping, etc.). For sure, it is not enough to understand what is going on and to do a good analysis. To make a step forward toward a constructive and sustainable solution, we need action. The ground-floor of a *win-win* situation in our case is *social discourse theories* (us/them, celebrating differences and diversity), and it does not matter if we are on one side of a conflict or playing the role of mediator (third-side interventions); it means that we concentrate on the quality of interpersonal relations and social change.

Let us remind you how we managed these theoretical approaches in practice during the training course.

Conflict – What an Opportunity!

When people talk about conflict, what do they think about? What kind of experiences do they have and what kind of words do they use to explain emotions and reactions?

The word “conflict” usually has negative connotations and is most closely associated with violence. The experiences of being in a conflict with another person or other people, which accumulate over time, usually make the list of associations related to conflict as something destructive.

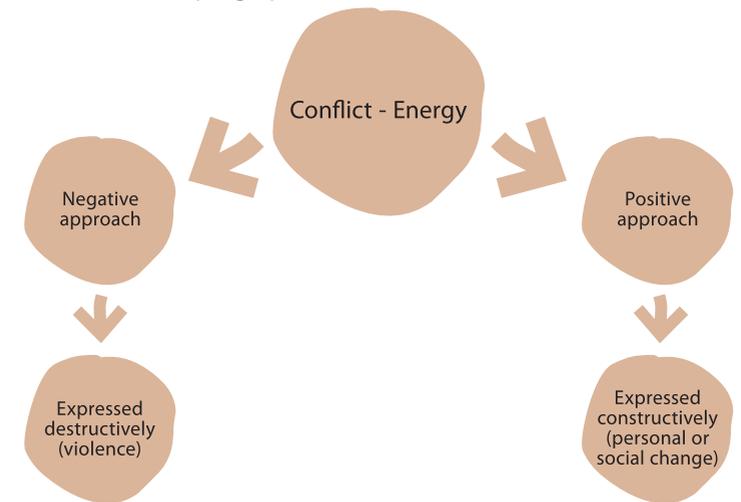
After the “Chairs in Conflict” exercise, when the participants were asked, according to their own understanding of the meaning of the word “conflict”, to create a conflict situation by using two chairs, the list below appeared from a brainstorming of associations:

- | | | |
|--|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anger • Ignorance • Misunderstanding • Miscommunication • False expectations • Actors involved not equal • Love/hate relationships | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social exclusion • Unwillingness • Silence • Intolerance • Disappointment • Everyone has their own ideas • Real life | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actors involved pulling in different directions • Conflict can start from misunderstanding, aggression, unwillingness to understand other people |
|--|--|---|

The word “conflict” is made up of two words from Latin – *strike* (to strike together) and *shock*. These words suggest that conflict is composed of some force or power (strike), followed by strong feelings (shock). That is how it looks in the English language. Any language is strongly connected to cultural meaning, and cultural meaning has an influence on the way people think and behave. In other cultures we have examples where conflict has a different meaning. For example, the Chinese way to write “conflict” is made from another two words – *danger* and *opportunity*. People who try to explain the social phenomenon of conflict use different types of metaphors: for some, a conflict is like a fire (useful, but can be hard to control; at the beginning people will start to make sparks, then somebody will begin to blow, another per-

son will put on some branches, somebody will put on some gasoline, and the flame grows...). Others like to talk about conflict as a “black hole”. Conflict, as a magnet, can mobilize a lot of attention and effort, can suck in a lot of energy, and, in the end, can start to throw out even more energy.

Where there is energy, there is movement and change; where there is movement and change, there is development. Energy brings us a lot of potential. How do we use it? Fruitfully or painfully? This way of understanding conflict can be shown in a simple graph:



On the last day of the COME training course, the “Chairs in Conflict” exercise was performed again. Again the participants were asked, according to their own understanding of the meaning of the word “conflict”, to create a conflict situation by using two chairs. This time the list of associations and the expressions of the meanings of conflict changed:

- | | | |
|---|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chance • Challenge • Opportunity • Communication • Misunderstanding | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relationships • Real life • Life • Part of life | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not the end of the world • Feelings • Stage |
|---|--|---|

Myself in the conflict

Quote of the day: "Collaboration: where one and one is more than two."

Is what we say also what we really mean? Does "I don't want to go there with you; I would rather stay home and watch TV" really mean that there is a great movie on this evening, or I just don't want to meet some of your friends, or I am afraid you will leave me alone again and I won't have anyone to talk to? There is very often a difference between our stated position (what we say) and our interest (why we say it), and we try to explore this in the first part of this session.

People as human beings are very complex. One day we can have very constructive cooperation with our colleague, and the next day we might end up in conflict. Some situations or interactions with some people we can handle easily; with others it might be very difficult. When you are in a good mood, are working on a topic you like, and two days ago your nephew was born, you most probably react in a different way than if all night your neighbours were having a party, you couldn't sleep, and you have to cooperate with a person who has a very different way of working.

There are many elements which influence our reactions and behaviour. Those connected with our pre-conditions as human beings we can call "internal factors". Those connected with everything around us we can call "external factors". Understanding these factors might help give us better insight into our own behaviour and also the behaviour of the people around us. So what are they? This we try to explore in the exercise "Human Alphabet", and here are some examples:

External:

- | | | |
|--------------------|---|------------------------|
| • Weather | • Expectations from others towards us | • Institutional system |
| • Language barrier | • Culture (of country, region, organization, group) | • Living conditions |
| • Noise | | • Social values |
| • Time pressure | | • Social background |
| • Time of day | | |

Internal:

- | | | |
|-------------|-----------------------|---------------|
| • Beliefs | • Mood | • Skills |
| • Stress | • Attitudes, values | • Interest |
| • Emotions | • Physical conditions | • Habits |
| • Education | • Temperament | • Experiences |
| • Needs | • Ambitions | |

Abraham Maslow's theory on the pyramid of needs can help us understand how our needs are developed and from what ingredients they are made, which can help us a lot when reflecting on our own reactions during conflict (still, bear in mind that together with our needs, a big part of our reactions will come from other internal elements: knowledge, experiences, attitudes, wishes, etc.).

When it comes to dealing with a conflict situation, do we have a preferred style? Do we usually try to convince others that our way is the best? Or do we not like conflict and try to avoid it or make accommodations? For this we use the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument as a basis, which divides possible solutions into five categories (competing, avoiding, accommodating, compromising, and collaborating). Each of them is more relevant in certain situations. Knowing our preferred "style" and also understanding different methods help us to widen our options for dealing with similar situations in the future. This is also linked with our quote: "Collaboration: where one and one is more than two."

In this part we also use the first part of the "homework", where participants with the help of others in small groups analyze their own examples of conflict situations and try to look at the stated positions and the interests behind them, the different factors which influenced their behaviour, and also the different styles used. This leads to a better understanding of "Myself in the conflict".

Resources:

Kenneth W. Thomas and Ralph H. Kilmann
Robert R. Blake and Jane Mouton in their "Managerial Grid Model"

Communication

Quote: "Words can be walls or bridges."

The topic of communication is an essential part of the COMETC. Why? Because communication is an important part of our everyday lives as private citizens and professionals, and it is also an integral part of every conflict. Even more, sometimes the method or style of communication, or lack of communication, can be the reason for the origin of a conflict, and that's why the quote "Words can be walls or bridges" guides us through the whole session.

There are many ways to deal with such a broad topic, therefore we decided to focus on so-called effective communication and to try to practice some communication skills. The session started with what not to do in communication, which is connected with a practical exercise called TRIGGERS, which deals with how to prevent conflict and/or its escalation. Triggers can begin the escalation of a conflict if we use them more and more; they have the same effect as "putting gasoline on a fire". Each of us has our own collection of triggers that "help" us push people to the wall. Our participants use their triggers during group work and here are concrete examples from our sessions:

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Eye for an eye• Silence• You must...• Playing victim• Using offending (even if they are true) words• Beaten-dog look• Get-lost attitude• It is my turn!• You always! I never!	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Do something!• Raising one's voice• Selective attention• Changing the subject• Pointing• Looking down (policeman being "really" tall)• Comparing to others• BUT!	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• There is no way...• I'm telling you...• Crying• Digging into the past• Twisting words• Mentioning other conflicts• Emotional blackmail• Making assumptions
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The second step of the exercise is to try the same conversation without using any "triggers" during conflict situations. The big change in the communication process is unquestionable.

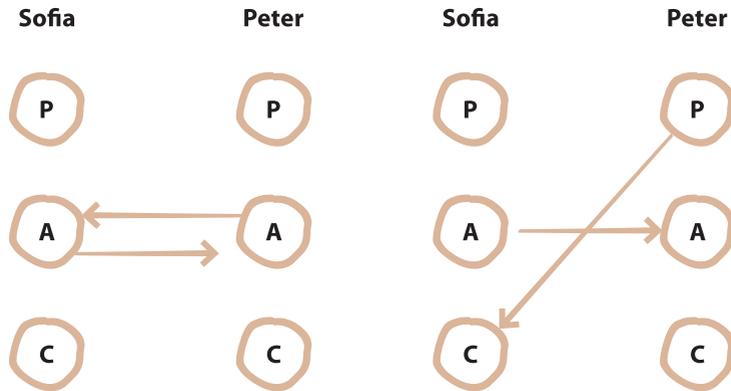
Now a question: so what to keep in mind regarding communication in conflict situations? Here we found a place for Eric Berne's Transactional Analysis (TA). The so-called, 'parent-adult-child' theory is one of the most accessible theories in modern psychology, however we work just with some pieces of it that our participants can use easily in practice. TA is based on an interaction between two people - 'I do something to you, and you do something back'. During the interaction, I can use three different styles of communication:

- **Parent** – This is our voice of authority, based on the conditioning we received from our real parents, teachers, elders, etc. We use the Parent style when we try to give lectures; to tutor; to guide; to judge; to protect; to support.
- **Child** – When our internal reaction and feelings are visible to others, we are using the Child style of communication. The child inside us provokes us to tease; to enjoy; to fear; to doubt; to express feelings and emotions; to ask for protection.
- **Adult** – The Adult style is the ability to think and determine an action for ourselves, based on received data. When we communicate using this style, we apply rationality and focus on our aims.

When we communicate, we use the Parent, Adult or Child style. Our feelings at the moment determine which one we use, and at any time something can trigger a shift from one style to another. When we respond, we also use one of the three styles. The key point in our COME concept is to be able to recognize the communication style of your communication partners and to react using the appropriate style. This skill can smooth over or even prevent many conflicts in your personal and also professional life. Our theoretical explanation is based on the common example of a conflict between two volunteers who are living together. The same situation is acted out by two trainers several times, but each time a different style of communication is used. The participants are asked to recognise which communication styles are being used at the moment and how each style can influence the following conversation.

Let's think about another situation from daily life, for example when your boss says: "You should be wearing a suit every day, not your second-hand jeans! You look like a teenager. Don't you know that image is very important for our company?" Your boss is using the Parent communication style. What would you do? In which style would it be best to answer? If you decide to be another Parent and communicate in a similar way, then the potential for conflict esca-

lation grows. If you resolve this situation by playing the Child, you may avoid the conflict situation momentarily. But do you want your boss to communicate with you as if you were a child forever? If you use your rationality and answer using the Adult style, maybe you will motivate your boss to also change his/her communication style and speak with you as an adult/partner.



The last part is dedicated to “It can help in communication”, where we offer a special tool called Non-violent Communication, which can help us prevent conflict situations from the very beginning. The Non-violent Communication model, invented by Marshall Rosenberg, includes a simple method for clear, empathic communication consisting of four steps: observations, feelings, needs, requests. How do we use it? For absolute beginners it can look like a pattern or formula: *When I see/hear...*(observation), *I feel...*(feeling), *because I need...*(need), and *I would like...*(request).

This pattern gives us an opportunity to communicate our problems to others in a special way, which makes the others think about their behaviour and its effects.

Imagine that you are an EVS volunteer and your roommate John has a different sense of living space and tidiness. How would you approach this topic with him without provocation? Let’s try the Non-violent Communication style:

“John, when I see two balls of soiled socks under the chair and unwashed dishes on the table, I feel irritated because I need more order in the common room that we share. Would you be willing to put your socks in your room or in the washing machine and the dishes in the dishwasher?”

Resources:

Eric Berne
<http://www.businessballs.com/transact.htm>
<http://www.businessballs.com/transactionalanalysis.htm>
 Berne E., 1964, *Games People Play*

Marshall Rosenberg
<http://www.cnvc.org/>

Rosenberg, M., 2003, *Non-violent Communication: A Language of Life*, PuddleDancer Press, Encinitas, CA

Rosenberg, M., 2005, *Practical Spirituality: The Spiritual Basis of Non-violent Communication*, PuddleDancer Press



Workshop on intercultural learning

Intercultural learning

Quote of the day: "We don't see things as they are; we see things as WE are!"

EVS brings different cultures to live and work together. Most often it is not only the volunteer and the host organization but also other volunteers all coming from different countries. What is more, it is not only about different countries – quite often in EVS projects it turns out that culture differs also from person to person, from working environment to organizational management, etc. This is very often mentioned as one of EVS's greatest potentials, especially by volunteers during on-arrival and mid-term evaluations. During the same training, volunteers mentioned the conflict situations and cultural misunderstandings they are exposed to as well as the culture shock they experience in EVS. Very often the source of the problem is the lack of intercultural competence of both the volunteers and the hosting project. Lack of knowledge, skills and an open-minded attitude – all that makes a person competent to deal with cultural differences.

Participants in the COME training course are invited to a CASINO game. After they sit at the chosen table, they start to play a card game. The winner and loser at the table move to another table, while the others stay. It is usually only at the end of the game that the participants realize that the rules of the card game were different at each table.

How do I react when I come to another table where the rules are different? Do I follow my own rules or do I adjust to the host table? Those leading the debriefing questions bring participants to the point: Is that a bit similar to the feeling that the EVS volunteer can have after coming to our country/organization/project? Is the behaviour at the host table a bit similar to ours as an EVS host? How do we behave in a real situation when two different rules/cultures confront each other?

The CASINO gave a chance for reflection on that situation. The impressions of the participants included:

- I was shocked by the resistance at the host table.
- I never realized that tables other than mine existed.
- I tried to find out what the rules were and adjust to them.
- We tried to show the visitor that he was wrong.

These served as a basis for a discussion on how we support in reality an EVS volunteer who comes to us with a different idea of culture. The personal experience of the players gives them an idea of the feelings and emotions shared

by the volunteers in reality, and therefore empathy can be developed. Based on the game, the participants review their assumptions and strategies applied in organizations and come to a discussion on the topic: When in EVS do we assume that we are playing the same game? That we share a similar understanding? If not, who should adjust, the majority or minority? How do we react towards differences? What do we really know about our volunteers?

The answers to the questions of the participants rest in the theories below.

Cohabitation – what “tidy” means to one might not mean “tidy” to another.

It is quite often that well-trained volunteers and organizations establish agreements for the common rules, e.g. for regular cleaning when living together in one flat. But what does “regular” mean? What does “cleaning” mean? These are details that seem to be obvious. And “obvious” as well as “normal” are exactly where conflicts with a cultural background can start.

The iceberg theory of culture (Sokolik-Selfridge, 1975) shows us two important things: what we see is only a small part of the whole and is often based on a huge, invisible part, and its exploration needs more effort from our side. This could be applied to both sides of EVS – the host organization and the volunteer. Understanding this theory makes EVS actors aware of the danger of judging an opposite culture with no deeper insight as a basis. Going a step further shows that individual people are also icebergs that might sometimes come to clash at their bases, even if on the outside they look similar. Whether this clash brings catastrophe or benefit depends on the development of intercultural competence.

Going deeper into a different culture requires some orientation that is offered by various anthropological research. Edward T. Hall and Mildred Reed Hall developed a theory of cultural differences regarding certain categories: fast/slow messages, high and low context, territoriality, personal space, and monochromatic/polychromatic time. According to the Halls, every nation could more or less be described by one of the categories. Even if the theory doesn't seem to be an accurate one nowadays, it at least gives a number of references for the consideration of groups and individuals. An EVS volunteer could then consider his/her own background and reconsider the same for the working environment. Such knowledge helps one to understand differences and develop empathy for the other side. And empathy is considered a basic condition for intercultural competence. What other skills/attitudes/knowledge should EVS actors represent?

Speaking about intercultural competence would not be complete without Milton Bennett's theory of intercultural sensitivity. According to Bennett, par-

ticular cultures differ from one another in the way they perceive reality, with so-called world-views. Based on that assumption, Bennett identifies six developmental stages of intercultural sensitivity, starting with ethno-centrism and moving towards ethno-relativism: denial, defence, minimization, acceptance, adaptation, integration. Going through the stages is part of personal development towards greater recognition and acceptance of differences. Participants in the COME training course were asked to recall one of their most memorable intercultural experiences and realize at which of the six stages they would place it. Looking at EVS cultural experiences in the same way would make it possible to define a starting stage of the process and reflect on possible development.

As this chapter began with the assumption that cultural differences in EVS can bring the potential of conflict, it can be concluded with the belief that intercultural competence is something that can be developed and learned by individuals as well as organizations. COME participants leave this session with the reflection: Where are we as an organization? Where am I as an EVS supervisor? As a mentor?

Resources

- Bennett, Milton J., 1993, *Towards a Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity* in R. Michael Paige, ed. Education for the Intercultural Experience. Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press
- E.T. Hall, 1969, *The Hidden Dimension*
- E.T. Hall, 1959, *The Silent Language*
- E.T. Hall, 1976, *Beyond Culture*

Conflict in EVS

Quote of the day: "Tell me, I'll forget. Show me, I'll remember. Let me do it, I'll understand."

Conflict in EVS is a crucial topic in our training course, so why are we addressing it after such a long time? First, it was important for us to give all participants common ground and some useful tools for dealing with conflict. Now is the right moment to test what we have learned from conflict theory and see how we can use it in EVS practice.

The opening part is dedicated to EVS system clarification with a visualization of all EVS project partners. Many problems appear in the unfamiliarity of roles of each EVS project partner or other EVS body. For example, if an EVS volunteer just came to a host organization and doesn't have an insurance card yet, then it is better to discuss this situation with our sending partner first and clarify what has been done already. It doesn't make sense to call, for example, the National Agency or European Commission and ask for help.

We follow with a rights-and-responsibilities labyrinth, where we discuss the responsibilities of the main EVS project actors – volunteers, mentors, host and sending organizations – and we clarify obscurities. Do you think it is old-fashioned? Yes, at present we just have a charter, which should give more flexibility and freedom to project partners. But nowadays many EVS actors do not know their rights nor their responsibilities, so we decided to focus on this important aspect: the responsibility of one partner is at the same time the right of other partners. This knowledge can prevent or help conflict situations a great deal.

Finally, we go deeper into task division between mentor and supervisor.

The participants are divided into four groups and in these groups they discuss different possibilities of task division between those project actors on the hosting side. In each case they have to think about the positives and negatives of the solution. They are invited to share their own experiences from their projects as well. Then a plenary session takes place.

You can have a look at a summary of the results from several training courses. It is up to you to find out which solution is best for your own practice, however it is important to mention that for a successful EVS project, the involvement of a mentor and a supervisor as two different people is essential and necessary.

1) Mentor and supervisor as one person

Positive aspects:

- This person can see both sides
- No misunderstandings between mentor and supervisor
- Mentor can act immediately (has all the authority)
- EVS is easier to control

Negative aspects:

- Possible conflict of interest
- As one person it can be difficult to manage the workload
- Who does the task when the mentor/coordinator is absent (illness, travel, seminars)?
- Too much work and responsibility
- Mentor has to juggle different roles
- No teamwork

2) No mentor, only supervisor

Positive aspects:

- More € in the organization
- Good challenge for volunteer to start independent life
- Volunteer can find mentor on his/her own
- No false sense of security (risk in relying on a bad mentor avoided)

Negative aspects:

- No-one to really know personal affairs
- No-one to complain to
- Subjective point of view
- Weak integration into the project and organization
- No work orders
- No personal support, huge opportunity for conflicts
- Potential isolation

3) Mentor outside host organization

Positive aspects:

- Mentor could be more objective, could find more balance
- Less possibility of conflict between volunteer and mentor
- Possibility to widen network of friends outside of HO
- Way to motivate ex-volunteers
- Different perspectives, views

Negative aspects:

- Might not understand HO very well and have a lack of status in HO
- Possible lack of interest in EVS both generally and in this case
- Arranging regular contact is much more difficult
- It takes longer and things are harder to change
- Economic question – the organization should pay external mentor

4) Mentor and supervisor as different people from the same HO

Positive aspects:

- Better project control
- More objective points of view on problems
- Sharing duties on different levels
- Co-operation between mentor and supervisor, which should lead to better resolution of conflicts
- Good communication, same language, same interests (might be negative at the same time)

Negative aspects:

- Duplication of some tasks
- Conflict between mentor and supervisor can influence the work of volunteers
- Lack of a good overview
- Difficult to look at things from different perspectives
- Unequal power in relationships, which can lead to conflicts

5) Other solutions

- Supervisor responsible for logistics, project quality, support, mentors – in co-ordinating organization – in each hosting place is a mentor responsible for some task and support
- Supervisor (mentoring if it is needed), mentor in the organization, second mentor outside of the organization
- Two mentors or more (one in project organization, one outside of org.)
- Mentor and coordinator from outside project
- Volunteer/ex-volunteer being mentor to another volunteer (long-term to short-term volunteer)
- Retired worker from the same HO as worker
- Common mentor at the beginning and later one is chosen

Resources

Programme guide, http://ec.europa.eu/youth/index_en.htm
http://ec.europa.eu/youth/evs/aod/hei_en.cfm

For those who follow Formula One racing, the term “pit stop” is well known. It is a moment in the race when the car stops on the side of the track and very quickly has all its parts checked. The pit-stop moment of the COME training course is when we collect all the theories and learning points presented during the whole course and put them in a visible place in the form of a tree.

But this is not just for recalling nice training moments. The tree also serves for the next activity, where the participants, in small groups, are asked to share conflict situations related to EVS that happened to them in reality.

Afterwards they choose one example per group that should be presented “onstage” in theatre form. The Forum Theatre method. What is it all about? Here Augusto Boal’s idea was used: Actors perform the conflict situation once, stopping at the crucial moment, without giving the solution. The audience watches carefully while the same situation is performed a second time, and each individual from the audience is able to replace one of the actors on the stage and change the flow of the situation so that it leads to a resolution. The situation can be repeated as many times as the audience can come up with new ideas. After one or two tries, the whole group is asked what the conflict was about, as well as to look again at the tree and reflect on what strategies were used in order to improve the situation. The conflict situation can be analyzed by the participants, with a facilitator offering new ideas about solutions. Also, the “owner” of the situation can reflect on the reality in an EVS project.

The exercise helps to apply the abovementioned theories to an already existing conflict and check exactly where the problem is. Is it communication? Is it an intercultural factor? Is it about using an inappropriate personal strategy? Are there solutions that can be used with the help of the new theories presented during COME? Finally, the Forum Theatre method also allows the practicing of several solutions and discussing them with a group of peers in a safe environment.

More about the Forum Theatre method:

Boal, A., 2000, *Theatre of the Oppressed*, London
Boal, A., 1992, *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*, London
Boal, A., 1998, *Legislative Theatre*, London

Mediation

Quote of the day: "Two heads are better than one."

From many examples in EVS, we see that it can happen that a mentor or supervisor will be asked to help in a conflict as "third" party. That means that they will not be directly involved in the conflict situation. This model is very close to the process of mediation, which is also a reason why we deal with this topic at the end of the COME training course.

As a mediator we should help all sides involved in a conflict to come to a commonly agreed resolution. For this, we need to gather as much information as possible from all sides. How to do it without giving our opinion, and remaining neutral and avoiding pre-judgements? An effective way to do this is to listen actively. Active listening includes different techniques (such as encouraging, clarification, rephrasing, mirroring feelings and summing-up), and this is also the core of our exercise in this part of the course. Let's look at one example and how we can react to it.

Situation:

"Of course I didn't do it. I don't understand things that are happening here in the organization and nobody tells me what is expected from me. It is very hard for me and I would like to use my potential."

Encouraging: *"Can you tell me more about it? I am listening... Go on, please..."*

Clarification: *"What exactly didn't you do? Which things do you not understand? Who is not talking to you? What would you like to do? Which potential do you want to use?"*

Rephrasing: *"If I have it right, you don't understand..., and you would like to be more involved in..."*

Mirroring: *"From what you have just told me, I understand that your position is hard, it is not clear for you what our expectations are from you, and you do not understand things which are happening in the organization?"*

Summing-up: *"If I understand you correctly, you said... You don't understand... Nobody is talking to you. You would like to... Is it like this?"*

Mediation is a very broad topic; with this example we have just opened the process leading us to a better understanding of the positions of the sides involved in a conflict.

Resources:

National mediation unions

Cohen, R., 1995, *Students Resolving Conflict*, Good Year Books, Glenview

Charles Wiggins, 1996

The most common problems in EVS projects

Project management

- No clear role or task division in the project/organization
- Lack of communication in the project (in all phases, between the main partners)
- Too much work
- Not enough work
- Routine work
- Different expectations
- Job substitution
- Language course is missing
- Language barrier

Private life

- Accommodation (not enough privacy, roommates, working and living in the same place)
- Problems with free time (not enough possibilities for free-time activity; not enough free time)
- Problems with food and pocket money
- Wrong motivation for EVS
- Homesickness
- Running away from personal problems at home

Terminology / Abbreviations / Glossary

YiA – *Youth in Action Programme (2007–2013)* – European Community Program for non-formal education of young people.

EVS volunteer – young person between 18 and 30 years of age, active in a project in a foreign country.

SO – *sending organization* – EVS project partner responsible for preparation of the volunteer's departure to the host country, his/her monitoring during the project, and follow-up activities after his/her arrival back home.

HO – *host organization* – EVS project partner responsible for hosting the volunteer, along with organizing hosting placement with learning and service features as well as technical stay and support.

CO – *co-ordinating organization* – an umbrella organization for several sending/host organizations, mainly responsible for administrative tasks.

NA – *National Agency* – body responsible for administration/coordination/implementation of the YiA Programme on a national level.

EACEA – Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency in Brussels, working with the YiA Programme (as well as other EU Programmes) on a centralized level.

Mentor/Tutor – person responsible for support of the volunteer in a hosting project.

Supervisor / Coordinator / Project leader – person responsible for working arrangements of the volunteer in a hosting project.

AA – *Activity Agreement* – contract signed by the sending and host organizations as well as the volunteer at the beginning of an EVS project. The AA states the conditions of the project.

Pre-Departure Training – preparation training for volunteers organized in their home country before departure to an EVS project, often organized by a National Agency or assigned organization.

On-Arrival Training – orientation training organized for volunteers in their host country after their arrival to hosting projects, often arranged by a National Agency or assigned organization.

Mid-Term Evaluation – training organized for volunteers in their host country, more or less in the middle of the project, in order to evaluate the EVS experience.

Final Evaluation – evaluation and follow-up training organized for volunteers after coming back to their home country.

AXA – company insuring EVS volunteers.

EI nr – Expression of Interest number – number of the organization accredited on a national level to host/send EVS volunteers.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we would like to encourage you to learn more about the topic of conflict. Hopefully you will find the booklet a useful and important aid for building competences primarily for EVS projects – and also in your personal life. We also hope that the experience of participating in the TC will bring you useful ideas for developing a higher EVS project quality, more fulfilling interpersonal relationships, and a better understanding of ourselves.

Conflict resolution/transformation/management skills are a part of the skills which we develop over our lifetimes. We can easily and quickly use violence or become destructive, but to use that mobilized energy and focus to create something good for us and to share that with others is often very difficult and requires much more effort, control and knowledge. Also, we need to work a lot on ourselves, to get to know ourselves, our personal identities, needs, feelings, etc. The last quote we would like to offer in this booklet is Gandhi's motto: "You must be the change you wish to see".

We want to thank you for your cooperation and contribution in taking part in the COME TC and we invite you to continue to share your experience and knowledge with us. We are looking forward to more feedback, suggestions, questions, etc. Please feel free to contact us in the future.

Resources

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2. Association for Peace Education Work, www.dadalos.org, Stability Pact, Sarajevo
3. Council of Europe & European Commission, 2000, *Intercultural Learning*, Council of Europe Publishing, Strasbourg
4. Danish Centre for Conflict Resolution, 1996, *Courses in Conflict Resolution*, Center for Konfliktløsning, Copenhagen
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Tomáš Pešek (Slovakia) – actively working with the YOUTH Programme since the year 2000 in the youth organization PLUSKO in Slovakia, where he is also responsible for training youth leaders (team-building, project management, dealing with conflicts, etc.) and the coordination of international projects. Currently also working as an external trainer for the Slovak NA (pre-departure, on-arrival and mid-term training sessions, training sessions for SO, HO) and involved in some other national and international training courses. In Slovakia also involved in youth policy development and recognition of non-formal education.

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Sofia (EU) – our EVS volunteer – is a hand puppet that we used during the whole training course to portray common examples of different conflict situations. All of the conflict situations are fictitious, but they are based on the real experiences of many EVS volunteers.



Sofia – “alive” EVS volunteer



Conflict – What an Opportunity!
COME – Conflict Management for Actors in EVS Projects

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