

Lessons
in process

**The
TAWA
Story**

Christine Herzog
Deborah Radford

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Our thanks to Jenny Rankine of Words and Pictures for editing and designing this second edition.

Dedication

This report is dedicated to women who are trying to find new ways of working together, for their commitment and courage.

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Contents

5	Summary
6	Preface
8	Introduction
11	Section 1: Lack of social base
16	Section 2: Poor relationships
19	Section 3: Inadequate organisational structure
24	Section 4: Making decisions
27	Section 5: Consequences of differences in perspective
31	Section 6: Power
35	Conclusion
36	Glossary
37	Appendix: Guidelines for consensus decision-making
39	References
	Diagrams
6	1 Action/Reflection model
7	2 The Wave – Different perspectives at a moment in time
8	3 TAWA's four major issues
12	4 Developing a social base
13	5 Life cycle of an organisation
14	6 The growth and decline of groups
16	7 Shannon's model of the communication process
21	8 The feedback process
31	9 The power pole



Summary

THIS REPORT has been written in an attempt to understand why a women's group using alternative processes was not able to survive differences that arose within the group, and to share the learning that has resulted for some of us on reflecting on those events.

Our major finding is that we would have been better able to deal with the issues that arose if we had established a social base at the very beginning, before setting up an organisational structure, and well before undertaking any tasks.

There were two major consequences of the lack of social base:

- The structure was never able to work adequately for all those involved, and
- Relationships deteriorated badly.

These two factors reinforced each other and contributed to the final, fatal problem: decision making that was named "consensus" but was not adequate for the situation.

The lack of social base - of sharing expectations, needs and skills - led to many problems. A major one was that the organisation contained aspects of several different points of view that were rarely considered and never reconciled. Examples include whether TAWA was principally a contractor to the funder or a community organisation; and whether feminist principles were fundamental or an optional extra.

Another major problem was

that when even relatively minor things went wrong, there was not a base of positive experience and understanding among the women to carry them through resolution of the issues. The confusion about organisational structure contributed to poor relationships within the group and the poor relationships made it difficult to remedy the structure.

A particularly serious consequence of the poor relationships and inadequate organisational structure was the style of decision-making. The group drifted into using consensus without discussing what each person meant by it or what the positive and negative consequences were of using it. This should have been part of establishing the social base.

The inadequate organisational structure also meant that many ordinarily mundane issues, such as time sheets, were addressed in an atmosphere of distrust. Therefore, they frequently were not resolved, leading to more distrust and continued administrative problems.

All groups have problems with relationships, organisational structure and decision-making to some degree. They were critical in this case because members did not recognise and accept style differences. The final factor that contributed to TAWA's demise was the fact that the funding agency did not accept TAWA's solutions to these problems and refused to help accommodate the differences.

Our conclusion is that TAWA's vision was a good one, and that we can still work towards such a vision by incorporating our learning from this experience into our future actions.



Preface

THE AUTHORS were members of a community organisation (TAWA) set up in 1986 to provide employment training for women, by

women. The name was associated with the Tawa tree that grows in the centre of the North Island of New Zealand. We liked the story of the large Tawa forest stretching across a mountain range providing an enduring link between two regions and their peoples. As a metaphor for strength and connection it seemed apt for a women's training initiative.

Training was offered in carpentry, painting, computer skills, landscaping and preparation for work in separate courses or modules. TAWA worked under the administrative umbrella of Community Volunteers, an established community organisation (henceforth called the umbrella organisation). It was financed by Department of Labour ACCESS funding through REAC, the Regional Employment and Access Council (henceforth

called the funder). After nearly four years of hard work the organisa-

tion collapsed in March 1990, due to irreconcilable differences among its members. This caused considerable pain and hardship for many of us.

Writing this report came out of the authors' need to:

- Move on from considering the injustices of the past so that we can see ourselves as creators of the future, and
- Sort out our own thoughts and to share our conclusions with others in the hope that this will enable us all to avoid making the same mistakes again.

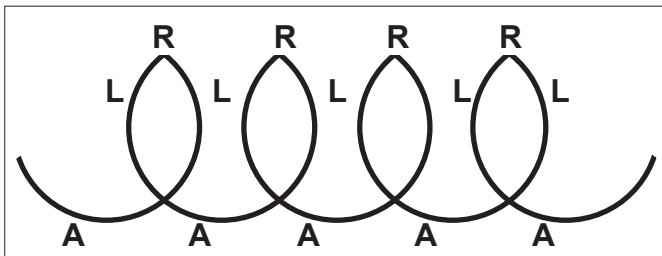
We have been considerably stimulated by readings in the theory of group process; the reference list includes those items we found most useful. It is a praxis of good community work that action and reflection are equally important and that they must be integrated: yet when we are totally absorbed by the action, it is virtually impossible to stand back and shift our levels of understanding deeper. Therefore this report is an attempt to integrate the theory with what happened in practice.

We have presented what struck us most powerfully in this time of reflection, and what seemed important to us as we embarked on our next attempt at addressing problems in women's paid employment. The women we have spoken with for ideas and advice, as well as our reading, strongly confirm that the issues we identify are common in women's groups, but that many of the themes emerge elsewhere as well. We hope our thoughts will be useful to others.

Preface to second edition

Revisiting this work 15 years on has affirmed for us that our reflections are still relevant, not just to

DIAGRAM 1 ACTION/ REFLECTION MODEL



A = acting
L = learning
R = reflecting

womens' groups, but to other community groups as well.

So, it is substantially the same.

We have tidied up a few things, deleted a few statements that were dated, and swapped some names for titles, for example, using 'the umbrella organisation' instead of referring to the name of a now defunct organisation.

Today this work might be more aptly called a case study of an organisation in that it focuses on strategic issues, attempts to diagnose key problems and to integrate learning for next time. But 'case study' was not the language of 1990 when we began our analysis.

Our perspective

When someone describes a problem or an issue, she does so from a particular point of view. What she sees - the facts, the "truth" - depends on where she is standing. This is her perspective, what sociology calls "cultural relativity". Diagram 2, the Wave, presents this idea graphically:

The person on the surfboard might say: "The wave is great, the higher the better; it may be dangerous but the excitement is worth it". The people in the boat may feel immediately threatened, the wave being about to swamp them. The person on the beach sees that the wave is very big but not immediately threatening.

The person on the top of the hill can see the wave but doesn't think it is very big - it's only one of many issues. The person behind the hill can't see the wave but hears a lot of noise. The person in the forest doesn't know there is a wave but is very concerned about the crevice opening up at her feet (which may be caused by the same thing that caused the wave!). The people

in the boat don't know anything about the crevice, and so on.

Perspective is a composite of experience, values, visions, and everything in our past that contributes to where we are today. Because everyone has a perspective, everyone has a place in the picture. No perspective is better or more correct than another. Each sees a "truth" from her own position, but when the positions are far apart, the truths diverge dramatically. Obviously this can lead to difficulties with communication and trust. The Wave picture shows only one point in time; the positions of people change regularly as they have different experiences.

When reading this report, please remember that we, the authors, can only present the truth as we see it. Everyone in the organisation had slightly different versions of it, and by March 1990 each of us had identified with either Group A or Group B (labels used to distinguish the women with fundamentally different points of view) about what the problems were and how to solve them.

Our report will be most useful to people who share our basic assumptions, one of which is that hierarchical structures are not appropriate for the kinds of social change we are pursuing. We can only present the TAWA story from our own point of view. References to other people, particularly those

in Group A, can only be from our perspective, which may well differ from theirs on significant points.

In this report, TAWA refers to the Steering Group (the decision-making group of staff) because that was the official interpretation. However, we recognise that the trainees that TAWA taught were an important part of the organisation as well. "We" refers to the authors unless specific reference is made to a larger group. In some theory sections, "we" refers to women or people in general.

The authors of this report

Deborah was one of the initial tutors when TAWA began in 1986. She resigned in 1989, burned out and frustrated by the failure of the group to address the real issues for her.

Christine joined TAWA as a member of the Steering Group in 1987 and became a tutor in 1989. We, Deborah and Christine, are responsible for the content of this report but appreciate the constructive criticism and support of it by the other women in TAWA who were members of group B (see the acknowledgements).

DIAGRAM 2 THE WAVE

Different perspectives at a moment in time





Introduction

The problem TAWA was trying to address

WOMEN'S problems with work are legion. Much of what women do is unpaid, including primary responsibilities

for domestic nurturing, housework and voluntary community work. Much of the rest is underpaid, including work in traditionally female occupations, or jobs where women are paid less than men when doing the same work.

Women seeking paid work are disproportionately unemployed. Women are less likely to receive the benefits associated with paid work, such as training. They are seriously under-represented at senior levels of power and decision-making and are more likely to have negative experiences, such as

sexual harassment.

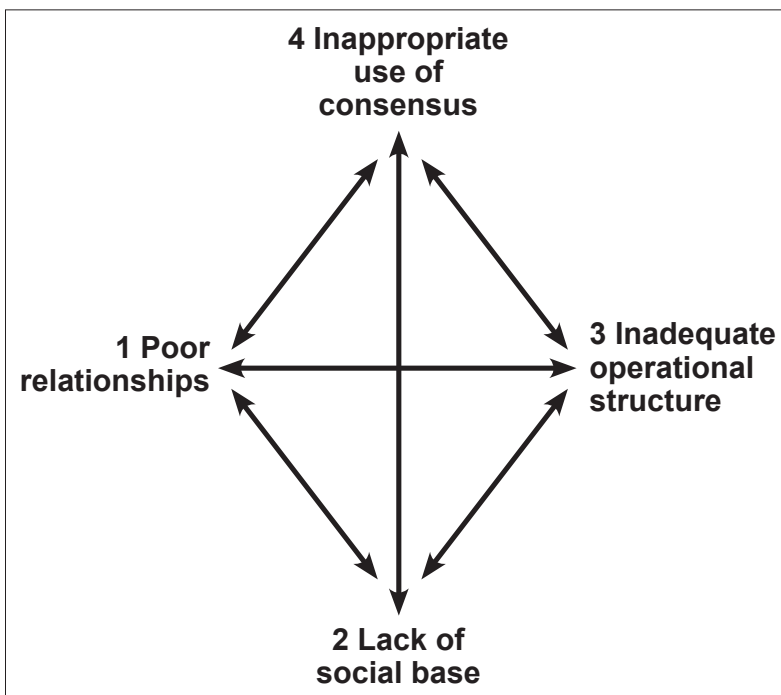
TAWA was intended to address only one of these issues - encouraging more women into better-paid work, that is, into jobs traditionally held by men. TAWA was to concentrate on supporting those women particularly disadvantaged elsewhere - Māori and Pacific women and women with disabilities.

The tentative solution

Several of us had tried to address this problem before. We had been trained in institutional settings, worked with men, sympathetic and otherwise, and taught ourselves. We had created jobs and helped train other women privately and in institutional settings. From this experience we concluded that institutions do not cater for women's needs and that training for women, especially in non-traditional occupations, should be by women who understood how the dominant society disadvantages women.

Thus TAWA was set up outside institutional frameworks, specifically as training for women by women, to operate in a way that addressed women's needs and concerns. Two consequences of this were that the official decision-making method was "consensus" and there was to be no hierarchy among staff. These decisions were not discussed or stated by the group but were implicit in the design of the programme as it emerged.

DIAGRAM 3 TAWA'S FOUR MAJOR ISSUES



The outcome

What has become of TAWA?

As the time approached to prepare a tender for the training TAWA wanted to provide in 1990/91, major areas of contention within the organisation became obvious. Some of us argued that the group should not expand any further until better decision-making, financial, employment and information systems were in place. We felt that previous expansion had taken the group beyond what the existing systems could handle.

As that was being dealt with, the other major issue of relationships between workers came to a crisis with the proposal by some that one staff member should leave. The outcome of negotiations resulting from that incident was an agreement that the time had come for the group to split into two.

This decision made sense on several grounds at the time. Among other reasons:

- The group had become too big to continue operating as it had.
- Some individuals were past ever being able to work together.
- Space requirements for the two groups differed.

In retrospect, the idea of a split made even more sense as many of the tensions resulted from frictions that were exacerbated by proximity. Our expectations of each other had become too high; for some women, their emotional need for members of TAWA to behave in certain ways interfered with or superseded the accomplishment of tasks.

The character of the organisation had changed over time; originally it was one with few resources fighting against the odds to survive, which had helped to make the group cohesive. After three years it had become a reasonably well-established and well-resourced organisation, which had operational, rather than survival problems.

Besides, growth beyond a certain size can distort an organisation's original purpose; by making self-preservation and expansion its overriding aim. In fact, we were so preoccupied with the internal problems that we frequently lost sight of our similarities and common purpose.

The more we tried to solve the problems the worse they got because the differences in styles created further problems. We needed time out and distance to allow ourselves to try working in somewhat different ways. We envisioned an alliance for working with the outside world - after all, we were all committed to quality training for women, however differently we interpreted that.

When the funding agency refused to countenance the separation, the group was at a stalemate. At this point, the umbrella organisation, under whose legal auspices TAWA had operated, officially took control of the programme after being requested by Group A to hand it over to Group A. They then employed a woman from Group A to produce a training proposal to tender to the funding agency by the deadline, three days away. They decided that all paid positions should be re-advertised and that in future the programme should operate as a hierarchy.

Group B was not consulted about any of these decisions. They immediately advised the umbrella organisation that they were distressed at not being consulted when they represented half of TAWA. They opposed the umbrella group putting in a tender at such short notice, as there was not enough time even to identify the fundamental problems, much less rectify them. They also told the umbrella organisation that by choosing only a person from Group A to write the tender it would necessarily represent only that point of view, for example about budgeting procedures.

When the umbrella organisation neither acknowledged nor addressed these concerns, Group B lost whatever trust and respect it had had for it. Since the only way to take the issue any further was to raise a public inquiry, which could be detrimental to the whole concept of training for women, Group B members withdrew from the situation. Whether intentionally or not, the umbrella organisation's decisions were tantamount to a vindication of Group A's behaviour and perspective, making Group B 'wrong' and rendering invisible the extraordinary amounts of energy and commitment they had put into TAWA.

The umbrella organisation apparently thought Group B members would apply for positions in this new organisation, even though none of their concerns had been addressed and the hierarchical structure of the organisation was the antithesis of their vision. Only one member of Group B applied for the positions; six chose to abandon well-paid, steady employment in which they had invested up to four years' work.

This outcome meant that:

- Many women had to deal with a great deal of pain, grief and disillusionment.
- Women involved had many residual negative feelings that flared up at the slightest provocation.
- The reputations of all involved were diminished from one perspective or another.
- Another women's community group was lost, with the usual reverberations.
- There was more ammunition for those who argue that alternative ways of doing things don't work and therefore are not worth trying.
- Government-funded training for women was now offered in a much more conventional way.

- The loss to this training of highly-qualified experienced tutors.
- The cost of training new tutors and developing, for a second time, training modules that were running quite well internally.
- The collective wisdom developed from teaching two of the modules was no longer available to the organisation.

The organisation did not consider the issues we discuss in this report.

The new modules that Group B tutors were developing were not offered.

Group B members had to start again acquiring the resources, and seeking work in an environment that embodied the principles they wouldn't compromise.

We resent the outside power structure lending itself to a win-lose outcome and that the women in Group A participated in it.

How this report is organised

Most of this report is about how we moved from the tentative solution (TAWA) to the counter-productive outcome (what happened to TAWA). The content has come a long way from our initial discussions. Our first level of analysis focused on the long list of structural problems.

These are what we refer to now in Section 3 as the operational 'presenting' problems - inadequate budget control, lack of accountability and information blocks, among others. We saw these as exacerbated by the poor relationships in the group. A conceptual break-through came when a friend shared Dalamu's model (described in Parry), illustrated in Section 1.

That model led us to group the issues into four major categories that are considered in turn and whose inter-relatedness is described in the diagram below. Decision-making is normally a part of operational structure but is so important that we are treating it separately.

Two themes cut across these factors. One is related to the Wave model in the preface, and involves understanding differences in perspective about the group's explicit and implicit problems. The second is the question of power and how it influenced relationships inside and outside the group and is inherent in any decision-making style.

1

Lack of social base

TOYNBEE describes the evolution of civilisations as “challenge and response” (as recounted in Capra, 1982). A challenge

from the natural or social environment provokes a creative response in a society. The society continues to grow because its successful response to the initial challenge generates a cultural momentum that carries it beyond equilibrium into an overbalance that presents itself as a fresh challenge.

This is repeated in successive phases of growth, each successful response producing a disequilibrium that requires new creative adjustments. These fluctuating patterns seem to be part of the fundamental dynamics of the universe. Conversely, breakdown occurs when flexibility is lost - when structures become so rigid that they are unable to adapt to changing situations and are unable to carry on the creative evolutionary process.

Taking the idea further, the functioning of living systems is controlled by dynamic relations rather than by rigid mechanical structures. The life of an organisation, as a living system, seems to follow similar patterns, striving for dynamic balance through continual fluctuations of variables, starting with its establishment and leading into an action phase that includes adaptation to changes.

At this stage, its health depends on its flexibility and the ability of its members to make creative responses to the challenges of changing conditions. Positive termination comes when the organisation has reached its goals and completed its tasks. Negative termination occurs when it no longer meets the needs of its members or when it is unable to adapt to change.

It is important that members of any organisation, especially one involved in the social change process, not only accept that change is inevitable, but also that it is healthy and potentially exciting. Since we sometimes view the signs that changes are necessary and about to happen fearfully, challenges are not always responded to in a way that promotes the healthy evolution of the organisation.

These challenges to the organisation can be an opportunity for healthy growth and development. We can share the responsibility for finding positive, constructive solutions, a course of action that benefits us as individuals as much as it does the organisation.

The emergence of an organisation is usually more explicit and intentional than that of a civilisation, but its evolution follows similar patterns. There are different models for what happens in the establishment period, but we were impressed by the emphasis on setting up a social base before beginning operations. In retrospect, we

have realised that probably a fundamental problem with TAWA was that this never happened. A second major problem at TAWA was that the organisation was unable or unwilling or unaware of the need to adapt in response to changing circumstances. The challenge was supplied by new information, new members, and increased size, among other changes.

The process of establishing a social base

Broadly speaking, the social base is the cohesion and identity created by the information that group members have shared with each other, upon which all subsequent decisions and actions are based. Starhawk (1987) calls the process of establishing a social base “telling stories ... which help us to reflect on what is common in our experience and what is different. From those reflections come our analyses and directions for actions”. Fitzsimons (1982) agrees and says the reasons for the process also include:

- To get accurate data for planning
- To be sure that everyone understands everyone else’s situations and wants

- To clarify different attitudes so they can be discussed and an agreement reached
- To help people get to know each other personally.

The process takes a good deal of time because it covers a wide range of issues that should be thoroughly explored. (See below for a list of questions that can focus this on specifics.) Taking the time for this will avoid some problems later and assist with the management of others. In particular, differences must be explored and valued in a positive context. The more the group members learn initially about these differences - for example in personalities, style of working and relating to others, limits and ranking of priorities - the better disagreements can be handled later and the easier it is to honour each other’s concerns.

Thus the process would involve considering the backgrounds, experiences, values, needs, interests, strengths, limits and fears of all the people involved. From this will emerge ways of relating to each other. The two together will help the new group to establish an identity and clarify its primary purpose; all other decisions and actions should be congruent with this purpose. The explicit outcome

of this process is decisions about what the group’s goals and initial strategies are and about its organisational process and structure. The implicit outcome of this process is sharing personal feelings, developing perceptions of each other, beginning to establish trust. It is imperative to consider carefully what techniques will be used in this social base process; for example, rounds, social meetings, role plays or structured experiences.

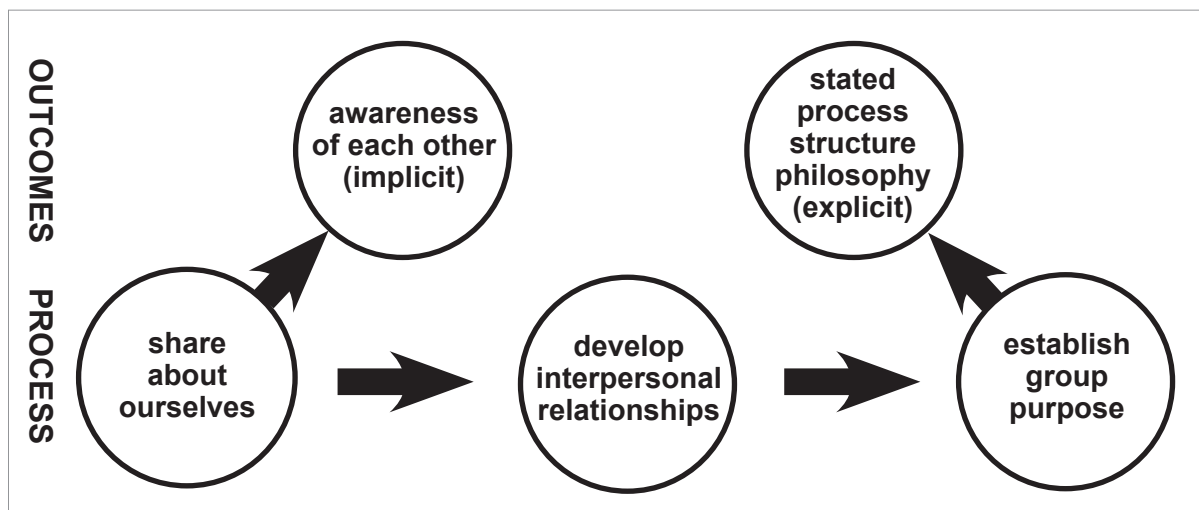
Social base

Diagram 4 shows how the process should help the group to achieve the implicit and explicit outcomes. It is particularly important for groups like TAWA, which was trying to operate differently from the mainstream, to establish a social base because there aren’t many other groups or places to go for models or advice. In retrospect, some of the specific questions that should have been considered are:

About individuals:

- What do unpaid members want?
- How important is it for me to pursue social change in this group?
- What does feminism mean to me?

**DIAGRAM 4
DEVELOPING
A SOCIAL BASE**



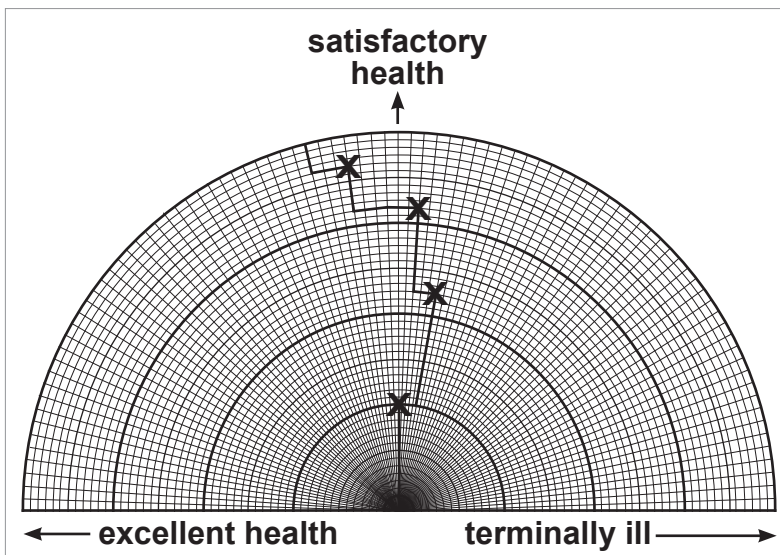


DIAGRAM 5
LIFE CYCLE OF
AN ORGANISATION

In this example, the process for dealing with the first event was poor, so the organisation's health declined. The process for the second, third and fourth critical events was good, so each enabled the organisation's health to improve.

About how individuals relate:

- How do we be assertive with each other and avoid using old patterns of aggression and passivity?
- How will we address personal power differences?
- What levels of accountability are appropriate?
- How do we relate to trainees and are they part of the group?

About group purpose:

- Is our principal purpose to promote social change or to provide jobs for TAWA staff?
- Is feminism inherently part of what we do or an optional extra?
- Is it possible to reconcile "honouring the Treaty of Waitangi" and being committed to working toward "multi-culturalism" if both of these are expressed as aims?

About how the group operates:

- How will we incorporate new people into the group?
- How will we address power differences in roles?
- Are we using consensus decision-making? If so, how does it operate?
- What are the group's rights and responsibilities with the umbrella group?
- What policy do we have for

distribution of information within the organisation?

- How do we reconcile needs for autonomy and involvement in decision-making?

The organisation operating in a healthy way

It has become clear to us that, just as it is vital to get off on the right foot with the social base and a congruent structure, it is equally important for the organisation to keep evolving.

Often the signs that an organisation has reached a critical point make us uneasy, but we should see these change signs as opportunities for positive stimulation, as they have the capacity to rouse the organisation to energy and activity. At this time change can enter the organisation and expectations and commitment can be renegotiated.

While immediate problems are being solved, commitment is being reinforced, and productivity and stability can return as the organisation renews itself healthily. If these critical points are ignored and issues not dealt with by the group, doubts are not answered and a downward path begins (see page 14). Diagram 5 illustrates the potential of critical points, which occur when an issue arises. This may be a minor disagree-

ment between two or more people, a member leaving or joining the group, or an increase or decrease in resources.

Life cycle of an organisation

The spokes or radii of this diagram represent the degree of health of an organisation. The concentric semi-circles represent time in months and years. The "X" represents critical events. The steeper the curve left or right, the more quickly and readily the organisation moves in the direction it is heading. Every critical point contains the possibility for a shift towards health to the left or to the right towards dysfunction.

Whenever a critical event occurs, the quality of the process for dealing with that event determines whether the health of the organisation improves or deteriorates. If the process is generally good then critical events help the organisation; if the process is poor then critical events contribute to its decline.

Hopefully, this demonstrates that critical points have great positive potential. Unfortunately, fear of differences, challenge and conflict more often causes organisations to view these times negatively. Critical points tend to be seen as crisis points; fear and

conservatism dominate. Rather than seeing these times as positive, healthy and a challenge - an opportunity for necessary continuous change and growth - we tend to approach these times in such a way as to make them work against us rather than for us.

It is important to be aware that ignoring a critical point has negative consequences for the health of an organisation. Ignoring the signs that indicate that change is necessary, healthy, and even opportune, can lead to trouble.

Incorporating the social base into the operations of an organisation

The social base is established at the beginning with all the initial members, but it needs to be reconsidered and altered over time, as working together clarifies the differences between theory and practice, between people's words and their actions.

New people will probably join the group after the social base has been established. All new people who join the group must go through a process of sharing as much as possible from the social base experience. Existing members must allow change, to accommo-

date the new people's needs and interests, so that they feel truly part of the group, responsible to it and supported by it.

How to recognise and incorporate the constructive innovations brought by newcomers while also recognising past learning of longer-term members is a serious and continuing challenge to all organisations. Longer-term members often resist change because they believe they have tried something before and it didn't work, or because they don't want to reinvent the wheel, going back over the same ground again and again to catch up newcomers.

The growth and decline of groups

We felt that this described the TAWA experience well. The organisation that eventually became TAWA began with the accidental combination of some ideas, resources such as premises and Labour Department funding, and key people wanting to change their work situations. This meant that the participants did not take the time to develop a social base. A positive result was that they used the resources to act immediately. Many groups do not survive the discussions involved in establish-

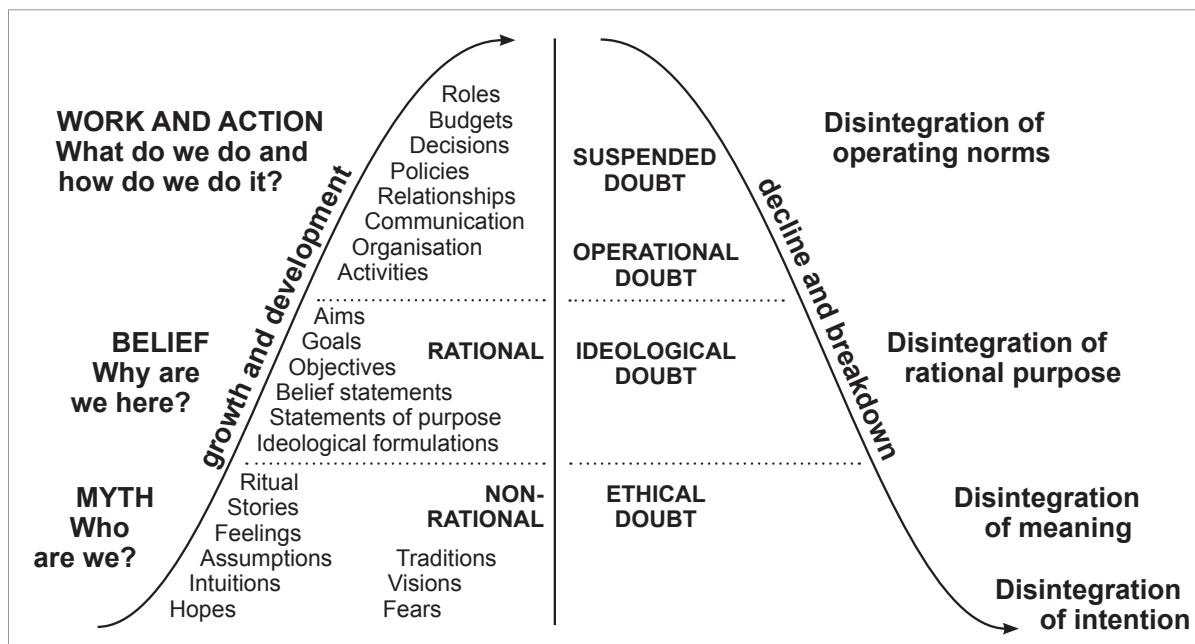
ing a social base because irreconcilable differences emerge.

The negative outcomes within TAWA were overwhelming. Parry says:

"The ultimate decline of an organisation can be regarded as a series of steps related to increasing doubt" and "... doubt must be addressed at the level at which the question of doubt is asked or at a lower [deeper] level. Doubt addressed at a higher [more superficial] level than that at which the question is asked will produce no effect and, if anything, send the doubt deeper".

He argues that it is constructive to ask questions such as "what do we do", "how do we do it", "why are we here", "who are we"; and that such questions indicate growth at the various levels. He says that an unwillingness to look at these questions, or responses such as "let's do it how we have always done it" and "I'm just here to do my job" increase the rate of decline.

**DIAGRAM 6
THE GROWTH AND
DECLINE OF GROUPS**



This is exactly what happened at TAWA. One member expressed some doubts at the operational level about budgets, implementation of decisions and relationships. Instead of addressing these doubts, some members of the group castigated the doubter. This had the effect Parry predicts of shifting doubt to the ideological level so that “previously unacknowledged or unexpressed ideological differences between people start to become very apparent” and

“the tendency is to alienate and divide into different schools of thought or different camps and there seems to be little or no agreement between the camps ... the paradox is that unless this level of reality is addressed directly... the holding together or the statements of philosophy are heard by [the] members as hollow and meaningless”.

Because these doubts weren't adequately addressed, many members of TAWA began to have ethical doubts, questioning

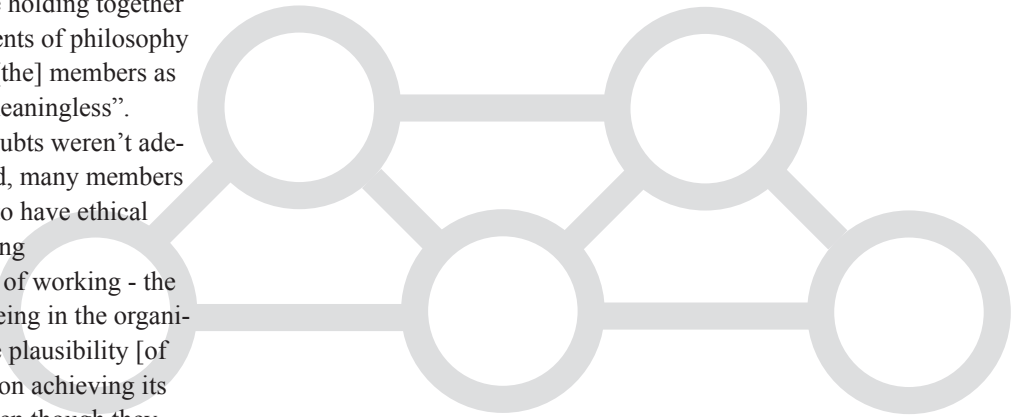
“the meaning of working - the meaning of being in the organisation and the plausibility [of the organisation achieving its purpose]... even though they may be well equipped at a skill level or the organisation may be well equipped at a resource level to complete the task”.

Ironically, TAWA was better resourced and the staff had had better training at the time of its demise than ever previously.

The lack of social base meant that the members didn't know enough about each other to ameliorate the tensions that inevitably arose. Also, the organisational structure was ad hoc. These factors, and the way decision-making systems operated, made it difficult

to address the doubts effectively. Ineffective decision-making also made it very difficult to resolve the specific interpersonal and organisational issues.

TAWA began at Dalamu's third level of development - action - and quickly ran into both personal and organisational problems. Fortunately we managed to avoid task problems that would have had negative consequences on trainees. Without a strong social base to counter-balance these problems, the organisation moved into a long, painful period of demise, which was recognised by outsiders long before group members were willing even to consider fundamental change.



2 Poor relationships



**DIAGRAM 7
SHANNON'S MODEL OF
THE COMMUNICATION
PROCESS**

AMONG members of TAWA the quality of relationships varied. In the first year they were satisfactory. In retrospect this seems to be because the group was small and few major decisions had to be made. As the group grew and more decisions were made together, the stress increased. By the third year this problem had worsened to the extent that some women were avoiding each other whenever possible.

By this time the group had about 15 members, which made it difficult to get to know everyone, let alone find the time, place, energy and inclination to establish good relationships. The structure of the organisation made things worse; for example, using consensus decision-making without training people in it. Appointing new staff also became a weapon - eve-

ryone brought in friends who were likely to become allies to their point of view.

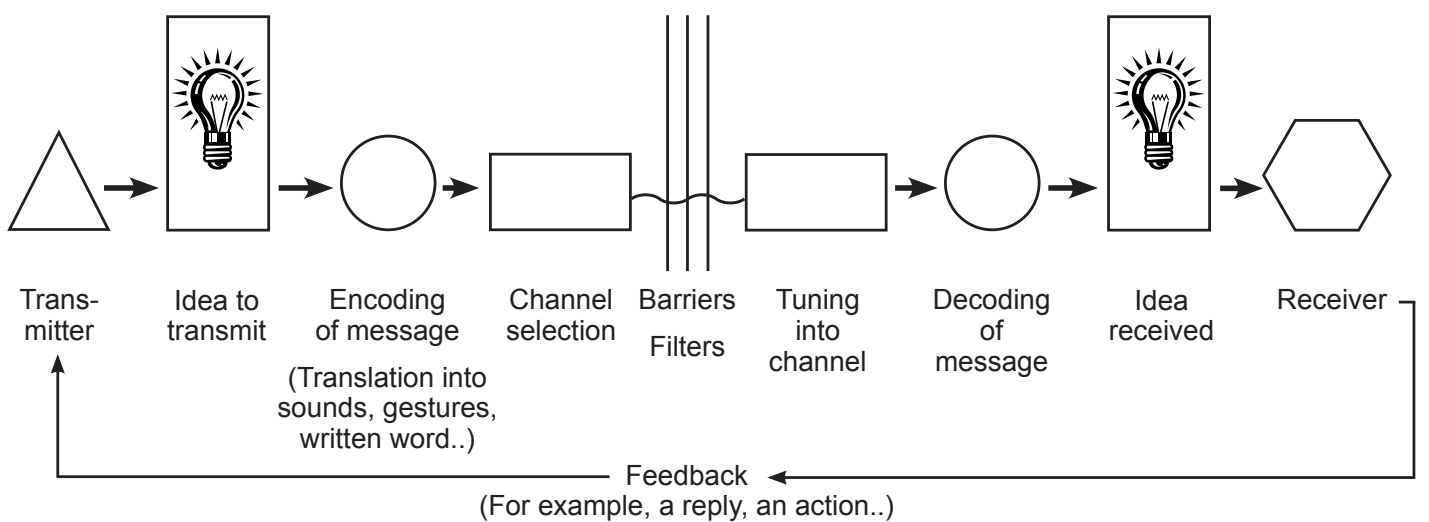
Many factors contribute to the quality of relationships. We consider only two major ones - communication and trust. TAWA didn't choose to pursue these issues as a group for a variety of reasons - it was too hard, too late, too scary, we didn't know how, or didn't agree it was a problem - although there were some attempts to improve interpersonal relationships. Furthermore, the organisational structure not only had no way of coping with poor relationships and their outcomes, it actually operated as though they did not exist.

Communication - the problem is the process

[This section is based on the work of Tannen (1987).]

All of us at TAWA experi-

In 1948, mathematician Claude Shannon, working for the Bell Telephone company, published this model. It shows that the simple art of communicating is not as simple as it seems. To convey an idea from the mind of one person to the mind of another without any distortion requires real skill.



enced the negative consequences of poor communication. These included the spread of unconfirmed rumours, stories changing with every telling, inappropriate use of emotive language and people not being told directly what others were saying about them elsewhere. Many people expect communication to resolve problems. TAWA provided a good example of communication itself being the problem, because the process of communication wasn't understood.

Linguistic gears drive all conversations, but we don't think about their impact on messages partly because of the focus on the intentions and character of the people sending or receiving the messages and on the message itself. In the simple transmission of one idea from person A to person B, there are at least five times that the idea is "translated" and three types of translation. The coding types of translation are choosing words to represent the idea.

The channels are contextual cues added to the words; for example, pitch and intonation, volume, speed, pausing, pacing and body language. The filters and barriers represent the influence of culture and background (such as age, gender, ethnicity, education and personality), environment (including noise and visual distractions) and the involvement of other people in the transmission.

If A and B communicate regularly, the situation may be further complicated by filters representing past experiences as well. Furthermore, the way A talks to B is partly a reaction to how B talks to A and vice versa. Because it is impossible to communicate everything that is relevant, the sender must choose what information to share.

Finally, the receivers are influenced in their translations by a tendency to hear what they expect to hear, by incorporating an evalu-

ation of the sender, and by the assumption that the sender means what the receiver would mean if she used the same code and channel that the sender did.

Obviously, there is great potential for trouble if the conversational or translation styles of A and B are very different! Both may agree with words such as "caring", "quality", "feminism", "honouring the Treaty" and "parity", but mean very different things by them (coding).

What is loud for A may be quiet for B, what are usual pitch changes for A may sound overly-emotional to B (channels). What A considers a question showing interest may seem nosiness to B, what A deems honesty may seem rude or insensitive to B (filters).

Many people don't realise that the filters exist and that they are coding and choosing channels differently, creating a serious communication problem. Tannen argues that women are even more sensitive than men to such meta-messages, particularly to the channels used, while men give more attention to the literal message.

Another common problem in communication is that there are often reasons for not saying exactly what one means. They include a wish to be polite, to demonstrate rapport, to avoid causing distress, or being unkind or insensitive. They also include a lack of awareness that assumptions aren't shared, that they need to be made explicit; or a desire to test the conversational waters without committing oneself.

These problems of communication style are particularly difficult

to unravel. When things go wrong, one tends to look for explanations in personality, intentions and other psychological motivations, which takes the relationship problem a level deeper than it really is. The problem gets worse over time as past misunderstandings are carried forward and eventually installed as permanent filters. Negative conclusions about psychological motivations also become fixed evaluations, always filtering what the receiver hears from that particular sender.

Also, when relationships are poor, the listener often responds more strongly to meta-messages than to the explicit message. Frequent communication may also worsen relationships, because when someone tries harder to communicate better according to her own style, she is increasing the friction.

She may unwittingly push the other person into responding by applying their opposite style more vigorously, thereby triggering a downward spiral. Ironically, communication about communication can make the problem worse, because it may make the participants feel criticised.

A specific example of how different communication styles contributed to destroying a relationship, and eventually an organisation, follows. One member of TAWA, X, regularly framed communication with others as "the mother of a happy family". Another member of TAWA, Y, resisted this framing. As X noticed this resistance, she tried harder to present that frame, which caused Y to move from resistance towards active challenge: "You're not mother"; "We're not all happy".

Y found out that information was not being shared, or not being shared in the same way with different people, resulting in mixed messages. This raised doubts for her about how the organisation was operating. X read a meta-message

of personal attack instead of hearing specific criticisms, which often happens. Because of the importance to X of a “happy family” frame, she desperately needed its complement, a meta-message of approval and fellowship. ‘

Y became angry that her doubts weren’t being received, never mind actioned, so she tried harder to communicate her concerns. Because X was reading a meta-message, this made her feel more and more under attack, and consequently even less likely to address Y’s concerns.

Before long, the two women weren’t speaking to each other. Rumours abounded as to what each said and did to the other, who had hurt whom more, and who was right and wrong. Each other member of the organisation sided with X or Y, depending on which perspective she shared (see Section 5). Finally there was a showdown between the two groups. We had all lined up behind either X or Y to varying degrees.

At TAWA members didn’t recognise that styles of communication were a reflection of background, not inherently good or bad. Discussion about communication problems focused on who was doing it worse and how they should do it better, rather than on how to accommodate the differences. Most stuck to their original communication styles and some intensified them.

Communication problems were attributed to the personality problems of the sender or the receiver, depending on one’s perspective. This led to very bad feeling, affecting everyone within the group. It would be more accurate and less destructive to explain these diffi-

culties as communication style differences. Length of relationships and frequency of contact certainly seemed to exacerbate the communication problem where it existed.

Some members complained of lack of honesty in communication, not accepting that how one chooses what to share is a matter of perspective, not a matter of absolute right and wrong. Many of the complaints of feeling manipulated can be seen as differences in communication style as well.

Trust

Trust is not an inherent attribute; it exists in the eye of the beholder only. When we feel we understand how another person will react in a certain type of situation, we can trust her, even if we disagree with what she will do.

Depending on our personalities and past experiences, some of us trust a new person until we have bad experiences; we assume we understand how they will act until that is proven false. Some of us don’t trust others until an accumulation of experiences establish that we can; that is, until they repeatedly behave in ways we can understand, though not necessarily agree with.

In both cases, trust is strongly influenced by shared experiences. Inconsistency, from the observer’s point of view, is disastrous to trust-building.

Trust is not the same as goodwill, which is more to do with wanting the best for each other in a given situation. We assume there was goodwill amongst all in TAWA to start with, but not necessarily trust. Goodwill is what kept TAWA going as long as it did.

Those who assumed trust were

offended by those who wanted to know more about how things were done or have more experiences before trusting. In turn, those whose style was to develop trust slowly were offended by the assertion that they were sabotaging the group by not trusting automatically. For the authors, trust is built up out of positive experiences, such as successfully resolved conflict. We were never able to convince those who took trust for granted that we who didn’t were not being negative about them – that it was a statement about us.

This was another example of differences. One was in how issues were identified - was the problem that we didn’t trust or that other people were behaving inconsistently from our point of view? Another was in deciding what to do about them – whether to get rid of those who don’t trust easily or discuss the inconsistencies. The lack of social base activities meant there were not enough positive mutual experiences, such as successful resolution of conflicting needs or priorities, or feeling safe when saying what one believes. These could not balance the subsequent negative experiences.

3 Inadequate organisational structure

AFTER establishing a social base, a group needs to determine how it will operate and what type of organisational structure it needs. This

includes ground rules, how to run meetings and settle conflicts, lines of responsibility, how to handle money and so on. The purpose of having an organisational structure is to help the group operate effectively and efficiently in ways congruent with the group's purpose.

The structures should support each member, creating an environment in which her contributions are valued and she feels empowered, which in turn strengthens the group.

These structures should be explicit to enable everyone to participate, and must provide a means to give feedback to sub-groups and individuals who are not being responsible to the needs of the whole group. The more informal the structures are, the more powerful the informal structures and elites become (see Section 6).

Because of the ad hoc way in which TAWA began, structures were developed along the way as time permitted and crises required. Because consensus decision-making requires that all members of a group agree with changes,

it was difficult to alter existing structures or to put new ones in place, especially as relationships deteriorated. Group B's concerns about organisational structure were concentrated in four areas: responsibility to others, financial management, staffing, and access to information.

Responsibility to others

[We drew on Sarah Hoagland (1988) and Margo Adair (1984) in this section.]

To promote social change, it is important to create an atmosphere where information sharing – that is, giving an account of actions or ideas- and feedback - giving an opinion on another's ideas and actions - are seen as essential and encouraged. We must feel able to share the truth as we see it and allow feedback on thoughts and actions to be given.

As the saying goes: It takes one mirror to see my face; it takes at least two to see the back of my head. We take our own thoughts for granted because they come from our own, necessarily limited experience, and we need each other to remind us of this. We need to look at what limits our own ability to give and accept feedback without feeling superior or diminished, without feeling the need to prove a point or to defend ourselves.



This feedback process involves both trust and clear communication. Learning to give and receive clear, uncluttered feedback is important for anyone working in a group. When we give feedback we are making a statement as much about our interests, values, fears and limits as we are about others' ideas and actions.

Because of the connotations the word "accountability" has for most of us we prefer to use the phrase "responsibility to others" where possible. The notion of accountability is usually associated with exposing oneself to judgemental attacks by others, and most TAWA members felt they had been attacked in this way at some time. This view of accountability tends to encourage us to separate our behaviour from that of others, rather than to examine our part in the dynamics of events.

We tend to ignore problem situations until they reach crisis proportions and then make simple judgements of right or wrong, which often imply that people are good or bad. This does not take into account our complex natures or the complexity of intentions and situations, and therefore doesn't help move us forward.

It is more helpful to consider accountability as the giving and receiving of information that can then be used by individuals and the group to act more effectively. It enables us to explain the choices that were made rather than to justify or defend ourselves. It provides us with information about how we differ. It offers us the opportunity to recognise and acknowledge our boundaries, rather than make the often inaccurate assumption that we automatically share identities and agendas.

The process of acknowledging our boundaries also helps us to become aware of our limits and hence of our need for others who, because they have different limits, have the capacity to help us expand. We have a chance then to understand better the full dynamics of our interactions.

The onus is on us as listeners to put ourselves in a position where we can understand the choices of others, even if we wouldn't make the same choices ourselves. It involves an assumption of co-operation rather than antagonism. When we recognise our own boundaries and limits we can locate ourselves more easily in relation to others.

There were always problems around responsibility to others within TAWA and these were complicated by the different ideas people held about what kind of organisation it was. Some of us wanted TAWA as a group to be responsible to the outside world, and each member within it responsible to the group as a whole. Although this was how TAWA officially operated, the group never defined or discussed the implications of this system.

Others thought the co-ordinator's role should include supervision of tutors and responsibility for information sharing between the organisation's different sub-groups. Some felt relatively autonomous but responsible to the co-ordinator rather than the group. This led to all sorts of confusion, misunderstanding, resentment and frustration focused on the co-ordinator. Attempts to develop processes of accountability among staff members were often seen as threats, particularly to the co-ordinator.

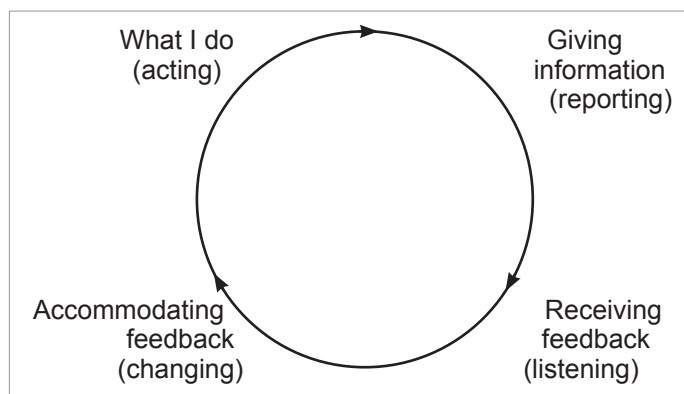
The responsibility of sub-groups within TAWA was also confusing. Was the Administration Support Group responsible to the administration staff or to the Steering Group? Did the Finance Committee have delegated authority to act or could any member of TAWA who disagreed with its recommendation unilaterally annul it? What was the relationship between the staff meetings and full TAWA meetings?

Staff tended to be united in the belief that they were primarily responsible to the trainees, but in practice this usually didn't go beyond reading the funder's code of conduct. Trainees had no formal way of influencing the training process except through their evaluations, which often occurred only at the end of a module. Sometimes this incongruity was brought up, but it was always lost in the press of more urgent matters.

Responsibility to those outside TAWA was rarely discussed except with regard to getting more funding. However, it was an issue for the co-ordinator and any others who worked regularly with outsiders because they were reminded of outsiders' expectations. Those who were involved with the umbrella organisation as well as with TAWA, particularly the two who signed cheques, had a conflict of interest in responsibility to both organisations, which put extra pressure on them and made others suspicious about their priorities.

The whole group should have been equally responsible to the umbrella organisation with explicit criteria about what TAWA was responsible for. Rather than considering ourselves responsible to the funder and the Department of Labour, it was more a matter of protecting ourselves from their interventions.

DIAGRAM 8 THE FEEDBACK PROCESS



Because of this the funder didn't realise the range, depth and longevity of the problems, which may have contributed to their unhelpful response in the final crisis. Responsibility to the wider women's community and to tangata whenua was only ever mentioned in passing.

One attempt to address the problems around responsibility to others involved a meeting with an outside facilitator in early 1989. At least two tutors found the following issues that emerged from that meeting to be useful enough to incorporate into the structure of their module:

- To whom do I feel responsibility?
- How is that responsibility expressed?
- With whom do I meet?
- What do we talk about?
- Do I feel safe; if I make a mistake will it be picked up?
- Forming feedback loops to give and receive information.

The feedback cycle is an example of the action/reflection model described in the preface and thus is fundamental to the social change process.

In the beginning when only a couple of modules were operating and the budgets were small, financial management didn't seem to be a problem. The umbrella group's book-keeper minded the training module accounts in her spare

time. As TAWA grew, she officially separated the umbrella group's and TAWA's work and began to be paid some TAWA money.

The finances were always inter-related though: the computer and all accounts information were located at her home, not the TAWA office; TAWA used the umbrella organisation's bank accounts so that organisation received the interest on TAWA money; the umbrella group wanted only the two women who were in both organisations to have authority to sign cheques.

By 1988, serious policy issues about financial management had arisen:

- Who has responsibility for expenditure – the book-keeper because she writes most cheques; with each tutor for each module because she knows what is needed; or with the group because it is using consensus decision-making; who decides priorities for expenditure?
- Should all the TAWA income go into a pool to which all can apply for money as needed or should it be spent on the modules in proportion to how it is received for each module?
- Do we make loans and to whom?
- What proportion of income should go to staff, materials and capital expenditure?
- Is it appropriate to spend as

though we have a future beyond this year's contract or not?

- Are we using the funding strictly to run training modules or more broadly to establish a training organisation for women?
- At what levels should TAWA members' participate in financial decisions, given vastly different levels of knowledge, skills and interest?
- What policies should apply to charges for work done in the private sector?

There were also technical problems:

- Cash flow crises meant money had to be borrowed to pay wages over a holiday period and rent payments were made late.
- Beyond checking whether there was enough in the bank at the moment, there was no forecasting system to determine whether we could afford certain expenditures, and what their implications would be.
- GST wasn't being paid on the income spent on wages, which meant a large bill in the next budgeting period.
- Budgets weren't available so actual expenditure couldn't be compared to estimates.
- There were no timesheets or other record of hours worked or taken as leave.
- Staff wouldn't or couldn't keep mileage records for TAWA use of personal vehicles and personal use of TAWA vehicles.

All of these factors combined to convince Group B that we needed a finance committee, and one was established in early 1989.

One of its first tasks was to develop budgets to ensure that 1989/90 expenditure didn't exceed income. One person spent over a hundred unpaid hours setting up a system. Only a few people took the time to come to an understanding of how the system worked, but the group agreed that no one was to spend more in any category than allowed in the budget without group approval.

For example, tutors or office staff could change how wages were allocated within their own task areas, but could not unilaterally decide to spend more on wages.

However, the system didn't work because actual expenditure was not being recorded in the same categories that the budget used, the person who set up the budget system was away for two months, some people didn't want budgets and others didn't understand them.

The details are different, but attempts to introduce timesheets, keep some record of leave taken, and record use of vehicles all failed. This was due to resistance from some women who did not understand how these systems ensured that money was being spent as effectively as possible and helped plan for the future.

Staffing

Problems with staffing included an unthought-out hiring process, lack of an induction process or training, an unclear employment contract and evaluation. TAWA's relationship with unpaid members was never satisfactorily resolved. There were no contracts with these advisors to ensure that their needs were met, and several left under unpleasant circumstances.

Even by the time of TAWA's demise, the group had not established what responsibilities the tutor positions included. For example whether tutors had to keep within budget, or arrange trainee supervision during absences. The job descriptions on paper did not reflect the way staff operated.

There were no explicit standards or expected levels of competence or experience, which made it difficult to determine whether applicants were suitable for jobs. We had a commitment to honouring the Treaty and affirmative action, but that was not reflected in the advertising process. For example, advertisements were placed in newspapers and through personal networks, but since most staff were Pākehā so were the networks.

It was expected that all staff would participate in the management-by-consensus process, but most applicants' abilities to do so were not assessed in the hiring process. The predictable consequence was that many were not equipped or not interested in the work required to do management tasks properly.

Most didn't realise that they would become employers of each other as well as employees of each other the instant they were hired. Few had experience of employers' rights and responsibilities. There was no way of evaluating the competence of new tutors and no provision for on-the-job training where it was needed.

The induction process was ad hoc and informal at best. New staff got information as others remembered to share it with them. In the last two years much of this information was conflicting. New staff felt they were left to get on with it until someone noticed them doing something wrong, at which point they were told off. They found this a very uncomfortable way to begin a job.

There weren't explicit policies about staff practices, so frequently distress was generated when some disagreed with how others operated. For example, some staff included lunch as paid time, some used vehicles for personal transport, some contributed many unpaid hours, some were paid only while on training courses, some took a good deal of leave while others never got time in lieu, some put a great deal of time and effort into management work.

The employment contracts were unclear. The form wasn't finalised until late 1989. The whole employment situation was riddled with confusion about whether staff were on contract or salary. Features of a contract situation were that the funding was on a yearly contract basis, staff were encouraged to use IRD withholding forms, and some staff used their own tools or vehicles. Features of a salary situation were that it was assumed that once a woman had a job she could keep it unless found guilty of misconduct.

We felt an obligation to provide employment for existing staff even when the contract situation changed. Payment was not related to performance. Some staff expected training as part of the working conditions. Some expected cost-of-living increases on the grounds that employees in other sectors were getting them, although they weren't included in the tender. Money came "off the top" of the income to run the organisation, and what was left was allocated to training modules.

Access to information

Access to information was a problem mainly for those who wanted to participate in the decision-making but did not have enough information. It also affected the operation of the modules to a lesser degree.

There were problems about who was controlling access to information between TAWA and other agencies, as only one woman regularly represented TAWA. There were also problems with information moving within TAWA – information that wasn't shared and misinformation that was. The latter got worse as the organisation grew.

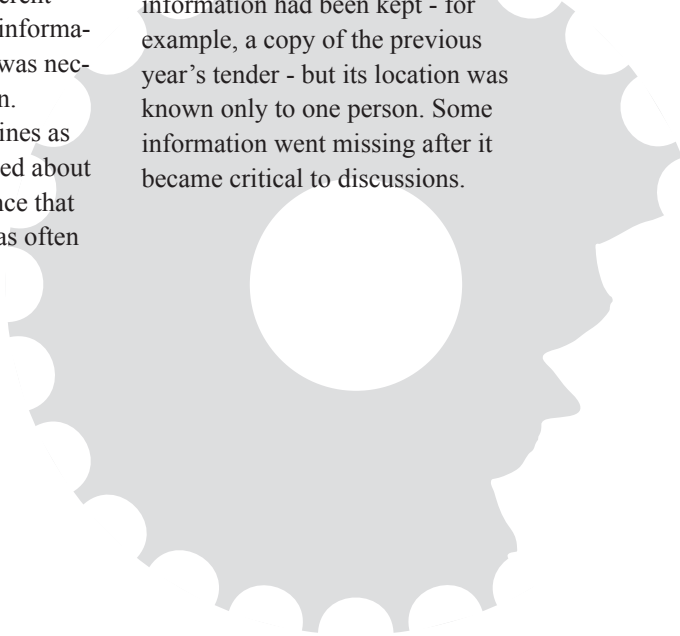
Some people had informal access to information from their relationships with others in TAWA. Different people had different expectations about what information should be shared or was necessary to a given situation.

There were no guidelines as to who should be consulted about what, with the consequence that important information was often neglected.

For example a great deal of energy was put into a drive for funding a carpentry workshop, without consulting the carpentry tutors beyond asking them for a list of tools needed. Another example is that the tenders to the funder were prepared with very little input from the tutors who taught the modules.

Finally, there was a problem with filing information. Some information was never kept, including correspondence with the Department of Labour and the funder. Very little was recorded about how different tutors operated their modules, which made it very difficult for someone else to take over their work temporarily or permanently.

A great deal of valuable learning was lost because of this. Some information had been kept - for example, a copy of the previous year's tender - but its location was known only to one person. Some information went missing after it became critical to discussions.



4 Making decisions

DIFFERENCES of opinion are inevitable in groups, especially ones as large as TAWA undertaking so many activities and controlling distribution of so many resources. Evolution comes out of the successful resolution of conflict arising from these differences, so it stands to reason that they should not be avoided but embraced and understood, and then resolved where possible. It is necessary first to establish an atmosphere where constructive criticism and feedback is valued, not feared.

Everyone must feel that if she believes something is wrong in the group, there will be a joint search to identify what is causing it. By taking time to do this as a group, responsibilities are shared and the person raising the issues doesn't run the risk of being scapegoated. Once the issue has been identified, everyone needs to contribute to finding a creative solution. It may take a long time to do this properly, but this is one of the ways trust is built. It is also a way in which it is destroyed if the concern is not acted upon early.

Groups handle conflict effectively when they see it as information about differing needs and recognise those needs as valid. Conflicts become disempowering when needs are judged or invalidated.

In TAWA, although the ethic was one of group decision-making, there was a fair degree of autonomy in the operation of the training

modules. They operated smoothly and effectively, relative to TAWA itself. The trouble was almost exclusively related to TAWA's organisation and group maintenance. The the strife occurred at monthly steering group meetings, with occasional private blow-ups. Many issues that became contentious in those meetings hadn't been a problem in operation. It was semi-jokingly suggested that if we stopped having meetings, things would be okay.

Another problem was the different levels at which women participated in the decision-making, due to differences in interest, priorities of time and energy, willingness to undertake unpaid work, and in culture.

Some wanted to be involved at all levels of decision-making, some were willing to take on extra projects, some didn't want to participate in group decision-making at all or only on a limited basis, some wanted shared responsibility for decision-making in their task area and some wanted most of it delegated to someone else.

The ethic was that all paid staff were to attend and participate in all Steering Group meetings, but some exceptions had been made and some staff opted out or participated on a very limited basis. This became a point of contention, particularly for those who did attend unwillingly.

Indications that the decision-making process wasn't working well were that decisions weren't being implemented and that the wording and intention of deci-



sions were disputed at subsequent meetings. These were all signs that some staff did not agree with the decisions in the first place or didn't understand what they were agreeing to. We had no formal process for reviewing whether decisions were being implemented.

It was contentious when a woman pointed out that something wasn't happening, usually because she wanted it to happen and others either didn't or didn't care. At this point arguments occurred about what the decision really was. We had no process for reviewing the previous meeting's record of decisions, and although we were meant to confirm the exact wording of each decision as it was approved, this was often neglected.

Consensus decision-making

There are three major criteria to be satisfied for consensus decision-making to be effective:

- Members' values must be compatible - they can be different but not in conflict
- Each must be committed to honouring the concerns of all the others
- The distribution of power within the group must be fairly even.

Consensus decision-making is not compromise, though it often involves compromise. It is not about finding the best solution from one point of view, but about working together until a decision is found that is acceptable to everyone involved. It recognises the needs of everyone in the group as valid. Consensus is primarily a way to consider problems and only secondarily a way of resolving them and making decisions.

It is an effort to achieve a balance between task and group maintenance needs, based on the assumptions that a decision needs to be made and that agreement can be reached. It is a process that can protect the interests of everyone involved in it, but the cost is that everyone must refrain from attempting to get what they want at the expense of others.

For consensus decision-making to work, it is necessary for each individual to feel valued by the group, and committed to the group and each member in it. It doesn't work if any members have an outside commitment that is stronger on any relevant issues.

It is a group thinking process and works best when the group is cohesive enough to generate shared attitudes and perceptions. It may not work if some members have contradictory values about an issue under discussion. It depends on the willingness of all participants to refrain from use of power over others to resolve conflicts.

Its advantages are that, when used successfully:

- It promotes power-sharing
 - The decisions are likely to be implemented because everyone agrees with them
 - The participants are happier because the "no win - no lose" focus addresses everyone's concerns
 - It promotes skill-sharing.
- Possible disadvantages include:
- It is not commonly used, so requires learning new skills; new group members need to be taught
 - It takes more time, especially while participants are gelling to know and trust each other
 - Everyone has to make an effort and share responsibility - often it involves hard work and creative thinking

- It is not possible in large groups or amongst relative strangers, for example in public meetings
- It is inherently conservative in that no change can happen until all in the group agree to it
- It is very susceptible to abuse by blocking from those opposed to a particular change.

One of the problems of using consensus decision-making at TAWA was the range of previous experience the members had in using it. There were disagreements as to how important consensus was, what consensus was, and how the process worked. Furthermore, we had no training in how to use it and few shared guidelines. Much of the decision-making work was done outside the formal meetings and became contentious when those who hadn't been involved found out about it.

When TAWA was well underway, we tried two strategies to determine the compatibility of group members' basic values. This is the type of exercise that should have been undertaken much earlier as a part of establishing the social base. A special meeting was devoted to considering each woman's vision for the organisation. After each described her own, we broke into groups to explore the implications. Nothing came from this day to indicate that we couldn't work together.

The second exercise was for each member to rank a list of values relevant to TAWA's operation in priority for her. Considering the large number of values in the list, the rankings were remarkably homogeneous. It appeared that the stated values were compatible. However, negative interpersonal experiences destroyed some women's commitment to accommodating others' needs. Furthermore, power was not evenly distributed within the organisation, both because of how TAWA was operating and because the women had

different amounts of power outside the organisation (see Section 6).

Some problems with consensus decision-making

Perhaps the best example of how consensus decision-making wasn't working at a critical time was the last few TAWA meetings, where decisions were made and actions taken without reference to the full Steering Committee.

Women began discussing what tenders TAWA should present to the funder for 1990/91. Some women had ideas for new modules. Some women were opposed to expansion before existing operational problems were dealt with. They felt it was inappropriate to bring in more staff and money when we were not dealing well with what we had. Both sides were frustrated by the others' disinclination to negotiate.

A woman who agreed with both points of view suggested that if the locus of authority within the organisation shifted from the group to the modules then everyone would be able to proceed. Those concerned about operational problems could modify the systems in their own modules and wouldn't be responsible for the others so would be willing for them to go forward. This strategy was named autonomy. A small group agreed this was worth considering and warned the whole group that this was to be raised at the next Steering Group meeting, so everyone could come prepared to make a decision.

At that meeting, people arrived late and several other agenda items were considered first, so discussion of the main item began late. Then some people had to leave before the discussion was completed. Because of poor facilitation and lack of guidelines, it was unclear whether the remaining people had authority to make the decision to go with the autonomy strategy,

although everyone agreed we had to make it at that meeting because the deadline was looming. The record of the meeting came out stating that the group had agreed to the autonomy proposal, and some people began to make plans accordingly.

Then, over the weekend, a sub-group met informally and apparently some decided that the only solution to TAWA's problems was to force one staff member out. Some members of TAWA who were not part of that decision, including the staff member concerned, were shocked by this decision and the way it was reached. There were no legal or TAWA grounds for firing her, which the sub-group admitted. However, apparently they were going to bring it up as a condition of the autonomy discussions going any further, even though fewer than half the Steering Group agreed to this.

Another sub-group met to decide what to do about this threat and concluded that there was no point in trying to work together any longer. Informal conversation between key parties in both groups indicated that a split would be acceptable to all. At the next Steering Group meeting, the issue of forcing someone out never arose publicly. Most people stated that, under the circumstances, the best thing to do was to separate into two groups, labelled A and B, and to submit two tenders to the funder for the next year's contract, though this was no one's first choice.

The next meeting was set for the day before the date that expressions of interest in providing new modules were due to the funder so that we could discuss them. It turned out that they were compatible. Group B had brought a draft of a covering letter to the funder explaining the situation. It turned out that someone in Group A had sent off a letter to the funder on

TAWA letterhead before the meeting, without consulting Group B, stating that TAWA would not be providing the Group B modules, as though Group A and TAWA were synonymous. Another meeting date was set to sort out the details of the separation of the two groups - each agreed to bring proposals as to how that would work.

At that meeting, Group B put its proposal on the board. It included concessions to Group A in the interests of fairness. Group A said that it hadn't prepared a proposal because it wanted to wait and see the funder's reaction before putting any effort into arranging details of the separation. It seemed to Group B as though meeting the outside agency's needs came before meeting those of some of the group.

An emergency meeting was called when the funder's decision that it wouldn't accept a separation was received. Group B came prepared with alternative proposals. Group A rejected both, didn't come up with any alternatives and used the half-hour break intended to work on solutions to argue further why Group B's wouldn't work. Group A finally brought an alternative proposal - that Group A manage TAWA.

Group B accepted this with the amendment that Group B be responsible for management since we were the ones concerned about management issues. Although Group A presumably considered it fair for Group B to accept Group A as management, they found the reverse unacceptable and refused to work any further with Group B on resolving the problem. Instead they went outside the group to the umbrella organisation and requested that it give them control of TAWA. Instead, the umbrella organisation refused and took over the TAWA itself.

THE WAVE diagram in the preface shows how people see things

5

Consequences of differences in perspective

Tdifferently, that each perspective will change with time and with new experiences, and that each perspective is equally valid for the people in

that position. The difficulty arises when people from different positions try to work together, because:

- It is difficult to accept that the other positions are appropriate for the people in them, given their experiences;
- Even when the different perspectives are accepted, it is difficult to find ways to accommodate those differences.

If the positions are too far apart, individuals in the group may not be able to work together, especially if they are trying to use consensus decision-making, because they will spend their time arguing about, for example, whether the wave is big or little, instead of seeking mutually satisfactory solutions to their problem. If members' perspectives and values are obviously different, the best conclusion may be to work separately rather than to continue to struggle against each other.

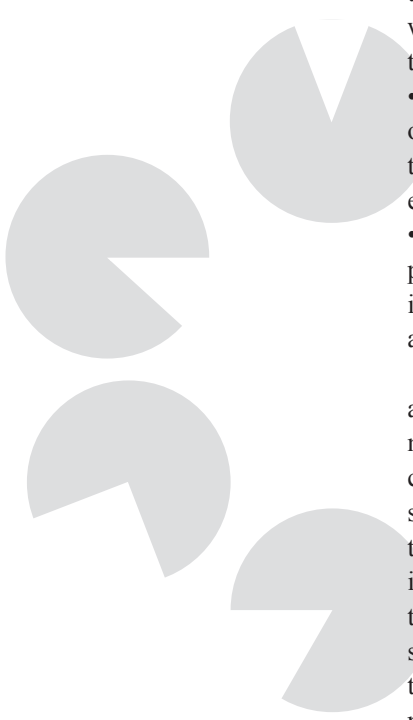
We would suggest that differences in perspective explain virtually all the issues that were clearly identified as problems at TAWA. In Section 2, we presented exam-

ples of how different styles of communication created problems. We showed that different attitudes towards how trust is established created negative interpersonal feelings. In Section 3, even our assessment of the operational problems is an outcome of our perspective.

For example, Group B had a fairly conventional attitude to financial management, assuming that it is worth the effort to keep records, prepare budgets and plan future expenditure. There is no proof that this method works better than less planned money management. As several people pointed out, TAWA had operated for three years with a loose, more informal style of money management.

The fact that the group didn't recognise the existence and importance of perspective differences at the time meant that we didn't discuss them and deal with them on that level. There was significant resistance by some people to even considering whether differences might be part of the problem.

This related to the culture of the group, which included an emphasis on maintaining and developing personal relationships. Some of those in TAWA felt personal relationships were made more important than achieving our training goals efficiently and effectively. As more and more people



felt uncomfortable with the culture and challenged it, the presenting problems became weapons in a terminal battle. Again, this was partly because the culture did not value challenges.

Culture of the group

Olmosk (1972) talks about seven prototypes of group culture, one of which, the fellowship model, fitted Tawa in some ways. Initially, TAWA espoused the philosophy, though not necessarily the practice, of the fellowship model and was largely unaware of the negative consequences associated with it:

Simply stated, the assumption underlying this model seems to be that "If we have good, warm interpersonal relations, all other problems will be minor". Great emphasis is placed on getting to know and like each other...

This strategy places strong emphasis on treating everyone equally. This is often interpreted as needing to treat everyone in the same way... When questions of choice or decision-making must be faced, everyone is allowed to have [her] say, and all opinions are to be weighed equally. No fact, feeling, opinion or theory is to be considered inherently superior to any other. Arguments are few and confusing, since conflict is generally suppressed or avoided.

Groups that tend to use this strategy also tend to be composed of individuals with emotional needs for warmth, love and trust in their fellow [wo]man. Much of this strategy is geared to satisfying these needs. Groups that use this approach are fairly successful in gaining members initially and often are able to mobilize a great deal of initial energy...

However, groups that employ the fellowship

approach as a primary strategy tend to face some chronic problems. Since much of the initial commitment is to individuals rather than to ideas or projects, the group begins to feel directionless. It has trouble stating what it is really trying to do. With the added strong emphasis on warm feelings and treating everyone equally, it often becomes virtually impossible to set priorities. There is bound to be someone who does not entirely agree with any decision. And, since everyone must be heard and no one must be unhappy, one person can immobilise the whole group.

For these same reasons, the group often has trouble implementing any decisions it is able

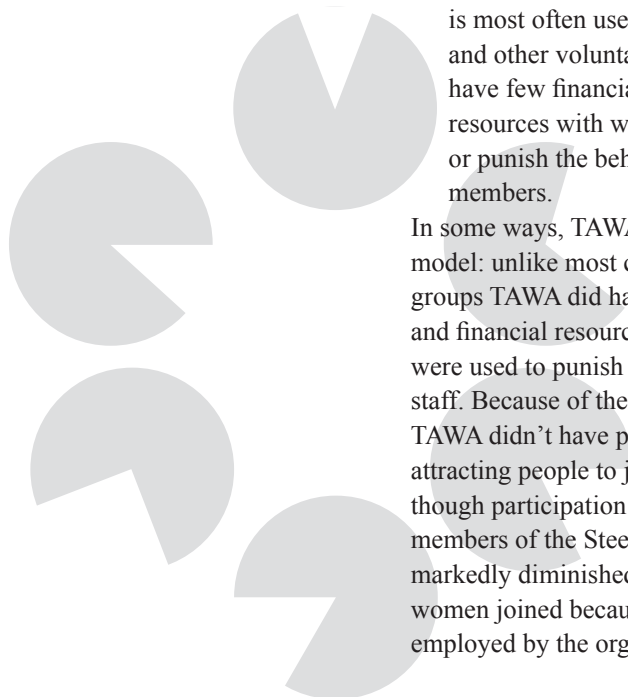
to make. The trouble may take several forms. Being unable to face conflict, the group often makes unrealistic plans. Because the emphasis is primarily on keeping everyone happy, questions of economics, politics or practicality are often minimized...

As plans are ignored or changed, it becomes increasingly difficult for groups using this strategy to maintain the commitment of their members. The feeling begins to grow that the group is floundering, not achieving anything and that it is a waste of time. At this point, old members begin to leave the group...

... groups using this strategy tend to suppress certain questions from their members. These are questions of individual competence and individual difference that would threaten the norm that all people are equal and that they should be all treated in the same way. They also suppress the question "What's in it for me?" This last question is often interpreted as "You don't trust us (the group)." If a group cannot find a way to face these questions, it is usually short-lived.

... the fellowship strategy is most often used by churches and other voluntary groups that have few financial or physical resources with which to reward or punish the behaviour of members.

In some ways, TAWA didn't fit this model: unlike most community groups TAWA did have physical and financial resources and some were used to punish or reward staff. Because of these resources TAWA didn't have problems in attracting people to join the group, though participation by unpaid members of the Steering Group markedly diminished. Since most women joined because they were employed by the organisation, the



initial commitment was to the job, not individuals. Most had a sense of what they were trying to do, even if it was at the level of placing a percentage of the trainees in jobs.

Though all probably shared the ethic of caring about others, it meant different things to different people. One who was strongest in espousing the value of caring saw no contradiction in accusing a woman of manipulation when she shared her feeling of powerlessness within the group.

Some saw it as more caring to share negative feelings about someone but only with intimate friends, not with the woman they felt negative about. Others saw it as more caring to discuss it directly with the person concerned.

In most respects, however, the Olmosk model above applies to TAWA. Most women expected everyone to like and trust each other, regardless of whether this felt right to the individual or not.

When a member tried to explain why she didn't have positive feelings about another she was called "negative". The notion that all points of view are equally valid fits well with consensus decision-making. Avoiding arguments, however, was very much part of the TAWA ethic for some members, which silenced others.

Members had different expectations about the degree to which TAWA was important in meeting their personal needs for warmth, love and trust. Some were disappointed when these needs were not met, while others were irritated by the pressure to meet them when they did not have this expectation of the group themselves.

Meetings, especially in the early days, were characterised by

dinner out and socialising. Everyone was expected to participate in the Steering Group, whether they wanted to or not, whether they were working four hours a week or 40.

The commitment to individuals was sometimes in conflict with getting the task done. Some of the original members became aware early on of problems arising from this style of operating. As one member began to express her concerns and ask for specific information to address them she began to be considered difficult and negative by others.

That was the beginning of her marginalisation within the organisation and the probable trigger for the final conflict two years later. Her expression of frustration with the negative aspects of this culture, and specifically with the problems in financial management and implementation of decisions that it produced, did to some extent immobilise the group.

Attention was focused on her being unhappy, and therefore a problem herself because she was not subscribing to the cultural ethic of feeling warmth, love and trust for all.

The concerns she brought to the group were never accepted as valid or given attention. By the third year it was becoming difficult to make decisions at all. Even before then many decisions, such as no money to be spent without being referred for comment from the finance committee, were not implemented.

Many plans were made without dealing with the current issues. Examples include the commitment to having a carpentry workshop when we had no premises;

and the commitment to honouring the Treaty of Waitangi when we weren't honouring each other.

Some unpaid Steering Group members left, because of lack of clarity about their role, or frustration over things not happening. Then paid staff started leaving, mainly because of unresolved conflict, and frustration over the lack of processes and the continuing confusion.

Questions related to staff accountability - for example time sheets, personal use of TAWA vehicles and tutor peer review - were definitely suppressed. Frequently this was accompanied with the comment that "if you trusted us you wouldn't be asking these things".

In retrospect, it seems that members of Group A and Group B had fundamentally different perspectives on priorities. Group A members tended to focus on issues in relationships: "the problem is that you don't trust..."; "the problem is the way you communicated"; "the problem is that you aren't caring for..."

Group B members tended to focus on issues of organisational management: "the problem is that we don't have adequate budgets"; "the problem is that we don't have an induction process for new staff"; "the problem is that access to information is tightly restricted".

The members of TAWA who eventually became Group B

accepted the fellowship model until it was apparent their concerns couldn't be addressed within it. For example, the concerns of people who disagreed with some decisions were dismissed on the grounds that they had been uncaring to disagree in the first place. Also, the problems that are associated with this strategy - poor financial management and implementation of decisions - snowballed as time went on and as the organisation and its budget grew.

The next step of Group B members was to attempt to educate the decision-makers about finance issues, on the assumption that if enough facts were presented, they would make the required change. This strategy foundered on a typical problem - finding time for the necessary learning. After this failure, more women made their challenges more explicit, assuming that people would then be forced to look at the problems and do something about them. Unfortunately our decision-making process was not able to deal with the conflicts that arose from these challenges.

It was in the interests of those who found the status quo accepta-

ble to cast things in personal rather than structural terms because this maintained the status quo. Some Group B members felt that things were made personal to avoid looking at the structural problems. One person was consistently identified by members of Group A as being the cause of the irreconcilable situation because she frequently challenged behaviour, and this was interpreted as a personal attack. Group B defended her personally because they considered that the challenges she made were appropriate and needed to be addressed to the structure rather than the individual.

It was unhealthy for the organisation to have one person identified as the cause of problems, because it diverted attention away from dealing with underlying causes. It also caused her an almost intolerable level of distress, and it permeated all other relationships. Those of us who agreed with her challenges did not take joint responsibility for the challenges early enough, which could have helped to divert attention away from this individual and onto the issues. We were too preoccupied with the obvious operational problems to step back and notice that underlying differences of style explained most of the behaviour in relationship and operational problems.

(This section draws on the work of Sarah Hoagland, 1988)

6 Power

IN THIS PAPER we define power as our ability to make choices. As women we are used to perceiving and experiencing power as control, that is, controlling others or being controlled, feeling powerful or powerless in certain situations. We may have used our survival skills of manipulation and coercion in the past to gain control when our real power has been very limited.

But the use of these very survival skills in new situations, such as in TAWA, is often what puts relationships under strain and causes organisations to fail. We end up using them against each other, creating an atmosphere of antagonism instead of co-operation.

In situations where we perceive power in this way we are unable fully to put ourselves where we

can understand why another acted in a certain way. Yet by attending fully we increase our ability to make choices. "This power from within (our ability to make choices) enables us to create new value through our choices, attending, learning and acting within limited situations while resisting the impulse to work for control. We don't have to take over and make everything all right.

Our power comes, therefore, from being able to act in situations to make things

happen - not in trying to make everyone else do what we want. As women we do not like to consider the power we do have because our more frequent experience is with the power we don't have.

While it is understandable that power has negative connotations for most women, we must acknowledge our power, our ability to make choices, and thus our ability to abuse it, to use it respectfully and responsibly.

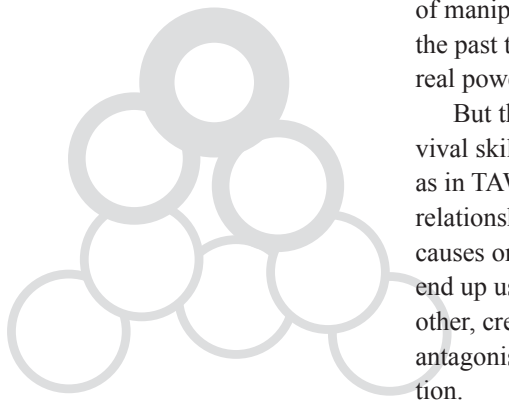
TAWA never considered how to deal with power or even recognised it as a potential problem, although it affected us at three levels: TAWA in relation to outside groups, within the Steering Group, and in relation to the trainees.

The authors, as feminists who believe that society is constructed to disempower women, assumed that it was desirable to narrow the gap between those with more power and those with less. One of our aims in being involved with a social change group was to empower each other.

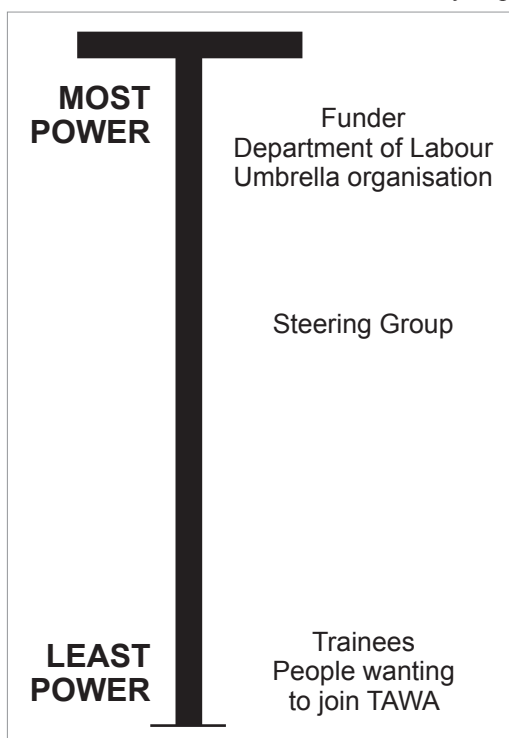
The issue of power-sharing by the Steering Group with the trainees was raised but never addressed because we rarely got beyond the unexpressed power issues within the Steering Group.

The issue of the power that the umbrella organisation, the Department of Labour and the funder had over TAWA was addressed as part of specific problems. But a general strategy, such as effective alliances with other training providers, was not developed because of the internal problems.

The distribution of power must be made clear before a group can attempt to make it relatively equal.



**DIAGRAM 9
THE POWER POLE**



If the social base exercises are not able to deal with the existing power differences in a group (see the end of this section for suggestions as to how to do this), consensus decision-making should not be attempted.

We would suggest that it became impossible to operate in the Steering Group using consensus decision-making as two sub-groups became equally powerful with no mediating forces to balance them. Outside agencies used their power to resolve the situation in a win-lose fashion.

Individual power within the steering group

The amount of power anyone has derives from many factors and varies with time and place. Some power results from control over resources, some from ability to influence, and some from might or the ability to enforce. Much of this power is assigned by institutions in society, which decide who gets money and who has authority to make decisions.

Some derives from individual charisma and confidence. Some comes from ascribed characteristics such as gender and culture; some from achieved characteristics such as communication skills or employment qualifications; some from position or role such as teacher or mother; and some from spiritual factors such as faith or support of tupuna.

The characteristics of people without power include dependency, external motivation and direction, low self-esteem, low sense of fulfilment, lack of confidence, fear of change, lack of reflection, conformity, low expectations of self, internal contradictions, poor awareness of themselves and others and a sense of isolation.

Many people at TAWA shared at least some of these characteristics. A group process to promote

their empowerment would include:

- Peer support
- Networking of resources
- Encouraging awareness through self- and peer-evaluation (see Section 3)
- Sharing of life experience and establishing goodwill within the group (see Section 1)
- Training and support for assertiveness
- Acceptance of anger
- Absence of guilt-tripping and put-downs
- Skill-sharing
- Intimacy and empathy
- Analysis to create socio-political understanding
- Safety for risk-taking
- Building of self-esteem and confidence
- Group reflection.

TAWA as a group did not achieve any of these, so was never able to pursue collective social change action, particularly in dealing with power from outside, within the steering group and with trainees. TAWA tried to neutralise some of the power disparities resulting from outside institutions by paying all staff at the same rate, making institutional educational qualifications irrelevant and so on.

Significant power differences remained. Discussion in the decision-making process was usually a free-for-all style that favoured quick thinkers, confident or aggressive speakers. The rules of the process were very much Pākehā women's cultural style: using "I" statements, consensus and setting agendas.

Many of the women did not have the necessary experience, or the inclination to learn enough to participate in discussion of complex issues in an intentional way. These issues include how to write a constitution; set up budgets; prepare employment contracts; the implications of a commitment to honouring the Treaty; or dealing with interpersonal stress.

Some women said they did not

really want to be involved in the group decision-making at all, and therefore tended not to exercise what power they did have. One of the original members of the group had extra power initially, derived from extensive previous experience of working in women's trade groups. Having financial skills enabled one member to pursue concerns shared by others but which they had not been able to act on.

The power of individuals was also affected by whether they had a personal relationship with the umbrella organisation, how long they had been in TAWA, who their friends were and thus what access they had to information from outside, and what access they had to resources.

Staff had considerable autonomy in their individual task areas, although there were often significant power differences within sub-groups of two or more women working together on the same task. These became explosive in at least two instances and were not satisfactorily resolved within the group from anyone's point of view. However, a major area of power disparity resulted from differentiation in roles. The importance of role power was especially apparent in that of co-ordinator.

The role labelled co-ordinator was particularly susceptible to having disproportionate power, both inside and outside TAWA. There were mixed feelings about whether the role should include supervision of tutors and responsibility for accountability within the organisation, typical management roles.

Some people, inside and outside TAWA, expected this to be the case while many inside TAWA felt strongly that that type of power should be shared by all (see Responsibility to Others in Section 3). Also, the co-ordinator's role became a gatekeeping one, including networking, liaison, tendering and being the sole recognised link

with the funding body. This meant that she controlled the information that came in and left the organisation, and who received it. For example: “The Labour Department says we have to..”; “others shouldn’t talk freely with Labour Department staff because the don’t have the knowledge of how things are done”.

In the final split, Group A, including the co-ordinator, kept the resources and funding while Group B went unrecognised. Outside organisations identified TAWA with the co-ordinator, which put extra burdens on her and made some others in the organisation anxious, since it was the antithesis of group responsibility. It also meant that outsiders got only one point of view when things got messy.

No other individual had the relationships or status to make public an alternative point of view, especially to the funders. The co-ordinator’s control of so much information that other people did not have access to made it difficult for others to challenge her actions.

This is a common problem in groups that use consensus decision-making, have role distinctions, and have limited liaison with outside agencies. Attempts were made to change this concentration of power in one position by job-sharing but this did not succeed. The information dissemination and liaison roles remained in the original gatekeeper’s hands while the new co-ordinator concentrated on office administration.

There was some separation of administrative responsibility for modules, but this only blurred the issue of whether administrative responsibility included accountability - it didn’t resolve it. This meant that power was still concentrated in the same way and that information still tended to flow freely to the same people as before

while remaining fairly inaccessible to others.

Elites in the steering group

Joreen defines an elite as “a small group of people who have power over a larger group of which they are part, usually without direct responsibility to that larger group, and often without their knowledge or consent”. In an organisation where one or more elites are very powerful, it is more important to gain their approval than that of the group as a whole. She continues:

Elites are nothing more, and nothing less, than groups of friends who also happen to participate in the same political activities. ... These friendship groups function as networks of communication outside any regular channels for such communication that may have been set up by a group. If no channels are set up, they function as the only networks of communication. Because people are friends, because they usually share the same values and orientations, because they talk to each other socially and consult with each other when common decisions have to be made, the people involved in these networks have more power in the group than those who don’t. And it is a rare group that does not establish some informal networks of communication through the friends that are made in it.... If there are two or more such networks of friends, they may compete for power within the group.... This is often the healthiest situation, as the other members are in a position to arbitrate between the two competitors for power...

TAWA certainly had many sub-groups of women who participated in the same activities and were

friendly with each other. The only one that wasn’t friendly was the Finance Subgroup, which therefore did not have the power of an elite. Elite sub-groups had more power than the sum of the women in them because of the way they made informal decisions.

In many instances this was not a problem; for example when co-tutors ran a module. Some of the elites, such as the Administration Sub-group, were established by the larger group, but the accountability of the elites was always unclear. Because there were no formal channels of communication (see Information in Section 3), communication was through the elites.

Although some new members resisted joining elites for as long as three months, by the time of TAWA’s break-up, everyone belonged to at least one elite; most belonged to more. This meant that there were no independent members to arbitrate after the various elites amalgamated into Group A and Group B and the funding agency refused to accept their separation. And TAWA did not recognise that we needed an arbitrator, bringing in a facilitator instead.

Principles for sharing structural power

Joreen (1972) suggests seven strategies to help ensure that the structure of a group will be controlled by the group, not by a sub-group. “Positions of authority will be diffuse, flexible, open and temporary ... ultimate decisions will be made by the group at large”.

- Intentionally delegating authority for specific tasks to specific individuals, rather than allowing people to self-select themselves to do them
- Requiring accountability to the group from those with delegated responsibility

- Distributing authority among as many people as possible. This shares the workload, encourages more ideas, provides constructive feedback from similarly informed people, and allows more in-depth consideration of issues
- Rotating tasks among different people so that skills are shared, understanding broadened, tasks and skills are seen as being responsibility of the group - not of one or two people. This should include an apprenticeship system for smooth transitions
- Allocating tasks on the basis of ability and interest, not on the basis of personal relationships
- Sharing as much information as possible: "access to information enhances one's power...the more one knows about how things work and what is happening, the more politically effective one can be"
- Aiming for equal access to resources by all, including information and skills as well as material resources.

Fitzsimons (1982) adds:

"Constantly check your progress towards true co-operation. Be firm with your leaders when they hold power or information to themselves, make them feel good when they share it, learn from your mistakes, and celebrate your successes."

Because everyone had more work than the time necessary to do it, only rarely did women volunteer for additional tasks. Accountability was a sensitive subject at the best of times; even where it was expected no way of operating it was agreed to. Attempts were made to have sub-groups in specialised areas, such as administration, finances and paid staff, to distribute authority. But they didn't work well because it was unclear what authority they had to act and what their lines of responsibility were. Because their membership

didn't rotate they became elites.

It would have been difficult to share all tasks at TAWA because some were fairly specialised, such as teaching carpentry or computer skills. But there was not even a policy of trying it where it was possible; such as for facilitating meetings or answering the phone. Several times tasks were allocated to specific women to be supportive rather than because it would be an effective way to get the tasks done. The problems with restricted access to information have been discussed earlier. Criteria for access to resources were never established.

Power of outside agencies

Outside agencies made judgements at a crisis point without having all the background information. We had all acquiesced in the co-ordinator's decision that we shouldn't share our problems with outsiders. Although several of us were aware of how vulnerable this made us, we chose to trust her not to take advantage of her privileged position rather than put the status of the group in question.

Many of the members of the outside groups had had experience with community development work and supposedly understood structural analysis. It was singularly frustrating for all of us in TAWA that they seemed to have forgotten a fundamental axiom - to promote autonomy. This means that the people with the least power, who are most directly affected by decisions, should be the ones making them.

It is an abuse of power to make decisions on behalf of those with less power - even "for their own good". From a community development perspective, the group's perception of its own good is the valid one.

It was helpful for funders to advise us of how they saw the situ-

ation, but TAWA, including the trainees, experienced the greatest consequences of the decision, not the funders. The one thing the group could agree on was that we preferred to take our chances working separately, albeit toward a common goal, than to continue in one group.

By not accepting that we were in the best position to judge this, the funder directly diminished the quality and increased the cost of training for women. The umbrella group, which was meant to be a community development organisation, weakened the power of TAWA by exercising power over it. It also completely ignored the theory with practice model described in the preface by not stopping to reflect on what had been happening before proceeding.

From our point of view, and community development principles, the changes that the umbrella organisation made, such as paying different rates for different jobs and thus making the organisation hierarchical, were exactly the opposite of improvements.

The actions of the funder and the umbrella group were both according to win-lose models rather than win-win models. They asked what they could do to help one faction rather than TAWA as a whole. If either of these outside organisations had threatened to impose a lose-lose solution, it is quite possible that TAWA would have found another solution. For example, they could have said that nothing would happen until all of TAWA agreed on a resolution. Group A would then have had an incentive to help find a mutually satisfactory solution (rather than assuming that they would win with outside intervention).



Conclusion

Learning from the past

WOMEN IN Group B have had positive experiences in learning from mistakes within their trades. Sayings include:

“Anybody can paint; the good painter is one who can fix her mistakes”; “You’re as good a carpenter as your ability to fix your mistakes”; “Mistakes are good, they are inevitable and they are how you learn”; “We are all continually making mistakes; the only way to avoid them is to do nothing.”

This contributed to our commitment to establishing a learning environment in which mistakes were accepted and valued as part of learning. This ethic has influenced our view of how TAWA could have functioned and its mistakes been addressed. The notion that we can and should learn from the past is also inherent in community development theory, and an inherent part of Māori culture that is often difficult for tauīwi to understand. To plan for the future we must look to the past, which is in front of us, not behind us.

It’s a matter of balance - the way forward

Women’s writing about learning from past attempts at social change includes many examples of how we swing too far to distance ourselves from how things have been done in the mainstream (Joreen, 1972; Hoagland, 1988; Brown, 1989). Joreen reminds us:

“Some of the traditional techniques [of structuring an organisation] will prove useful, albeit not perfect; some will give us insights into what we should and should not do to obtain certain ends with minimal costs ... Mostly, we will have to experiment with different kinds of structuring and develop a variety of techniques to use for different situations.”

It may seem obvious that we want to balance the advantages and disadvantages of different ways of working, but it is not so easy to do. The experiences of TAWA have raised the issue of balance in several areas: for example, between personal needs for involvement and independence and between group task and group maintenance needs.

Lessons in process

Our major conclusion is that we must go on trying to pursue our visions in a better way, not abandon them. There was nothing wrong with our definition of the problem: there are too many women who are unemployed or underemployed. There was nothing fundamentally wrong with our solution either. However, providing training only guarantees jobs for the trainers and does not change the work situation for most women.

It only assists them to compete for what exists - next we must try to change that. Nor did TAWA members have fundamental value or goal conflict. The problem was mainly a lack of recognition of process - for example, how to

share power in a way that empowers everyone in the organisation, and how to honour cultural difference.

We believe that to make changes in the world we must work together in groups where our old ways of relating and acting can change in a safe context. We need to be able to welcome challenges and look for creative solutions instead of feeling threatened, giving up and reverting to old ways.

We had ordinary problems, common in women's groups, such as lack of trust, poor communication, power plays, and inadequate financial management. Even before finishing the first edition of this report in 1992 we had requests for copies from other women's groups with similar problems. The difference for us has been in taking the time to reflect on them so that we can deal with them with greater insight next time.

Glossary

Aotearoa – Indigenous name for North Island of New Zealand; often used for the whole country.

“I” statements – For example, “I disagree” rather than “You’re wrong”.

Maori - Commonly used term for the indigenous peoples of New Zealand.

Pakeha – New Zealander of European descent

Tangata whenua – Literally, “people of the land”; indigenous people of Aotearoa whose ancestors have traditionally occupied their district.

Tauwiwi – Non-indigenous New Zealanders, including Pakeha.

Treaty of Waitangi – Treaty between some Hapu (sovereign bodies) and the British Crown signed in 1840 and incorporated in some New Zealand laws in the 1980s

Tupuna - Ancestors



Appendix

Guidelines for using consensus decision-making

Personal responsibilities of each group member

- To share their views in the group
- To listen carefully to others
- Not to interrupt others
- To ask what another person means or feels if you are not sure
- To try not to equate criticism with a personal attack; not to be defensive
- Not to speak over or louder than others
- To use “I” statements (for instance “I disagree” rather than “You’re wrong”); Not to speak for others or generalise
- To avoid emotive language, put-downs and one-upmanship
- To speak succinctly; not to talk too much, for too long or nit-pick
- To tell someone if you are displeased with them, rather than only telling others
- To be honest; not to say things that you don’t believe, and to share as much as you can
- To share good feelings and praise
- To follow the consensus decision making process
- To pursue lateral thinking instead of defending a viewpoint
- To catch up in your own time on things missed due to lateness or absence
- To share the work - facilitating, recording, hosting and implementing decisions; everyone can do a share of each task or they

may be traded according to ability or inclination.

Role of facilitator

The facilitator is not personally responsible for the meeting process or the behaviour of others. Every individual in the group is responsible for their own behaviour and for helping with the facilitation. The facilitator is to follow established meeting process:

- 1 To open the meeting on time; confirm the recorder
 - 2 To start with a round of feelings or other warm-up activity
 - 3 To check the implementation of previous decisions or outstanding actions
 - 4 To review the agenda or prioritise; this may include information sharing as well as problems to solve; to set times for each topic that may be renegotiated later in the meeting
 - 5 To open each topic
 - 6 To check that each person explicitly agrees with decisions as read by the recorder; to check who is implementing them and any conditions on implementation
 - 7 To check the time, date and place for the next meeting if it is not pre-set
 - 8 To finish with a round of feelings or other way of closing.
- The facilitator has a special responsibility for minding process:
- Keeping discussion on topic
 - Ensuring that all have a chance to speak, and reminding those who have spoken a great deal
 - Minding language and that people speak for themselves

- Suggesting different processes
- Checking whether a decision has been reached
- Minding time, although a different person may need to do this during some meetings.

If the facilitator wants more freedom to participate in the discussion without minding group process, she can ask another member to take over for that item; another member can request that someone else facilitate too.

Techniques for discussion

- Free-for-all discussion
- Round
- Brain-storming solutions (no discussion; every idea is recorded whether or not everyone agrees with it)
- Work in smaller groups and share
- Work privately and share.

Conflict resolution strategies

These are for use when prerequisites to consensus are met, that is, when the values of the members are compatible and each is committed to honouring the concerns of the others.

- Don't hide anger or conflict as it rarely goes away permanently by itself; it is better to take the time to deal with it at the first appropriate opportunity. This may be after the issues have been determined, a safe setting has been established or when others involved are available.
- If the conflict is about a relatively minor issue that doesn't set a precedent, one person who sees it differently from the rest may be willing to stand aside and have their abstention recorded
- A round sharing feelings may be useful to unload them so that the focus can be on the issue; there need to be no feedback on this
- Try other techniques, such as brainstorming

- Check whether further information needed; arrange to get it
- Get the people who disagree to state the others' point of view in their own words and check that they have it right
- The person saying no has to suggest an alternative that will meet the concerns already expressed by others; everyone in the group needs to help find alternatives. The group may need to check out what everyone's basic needs are on this issue
- Don't get stuck arguing over proposed solutions; if one or more members are opposed to a proposal, move on to considering alternatives.
- If several issues are being discussed at once, untangle them and consider one at a time; note related ones so that the group can discuss them later
- Check whether an issue being discussed is the "real" issue or is it deeper; change the level of the discussion. Keep going back to the level where people agree and work forward one step at a time; remind the group of what its purpose is and how the issue relates to it.
- Take time out; continuing to argue may merely entrench positions. This can include -
 - § Exchanging seating positions
 - § A few minutes' break for tea, a stretch or a chance to think privately
 - § Reconsideration later in the agenda.
- Put the issue on the agenda for another meeting; check whether a decision has to be made now and whether anything needs to be done to improve its consideration next time, such as more information, consulting others or a different facilitator.

Bring in an outsider to promote a safe environment, as people take more care in front of outsiders. This may be a resource person, bringing in new ideas or skills; or a facilitator, so everyone in the group can concentrate on the discussion.

- Check whether the values of the members are compatible and whether each member is committed to honouring the concerns of others in the group. If either is not true, the group will probably have to try other method of conflict resolution.

Conflict between two people

Interpersonal issues may need a neutral facilitator and can use the following process:

- Each person has half the time
- The first person begins by stating something she likes about the other person, to remind each of them that there are good things
- She then states the problem from her own point of view. She must use "I" statements about her own needs and opinions. The other person may ask questions to clarify what is meant but NOT discuss the truth or validity of the opinions.
- The first person then proposes a solution
- The other person considers whether she feels okay about that solution
- If she does, the transaction is completed; if not, she must propose an alternative that honours the first person's concerns as well as her own. Alternative proposals are offered by each party until consensus is reached.
- If time remains, the first person raises a second issue. If not, the other person begins her time by stating something she likes about the first, raises an issue, and proposes a solution.



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