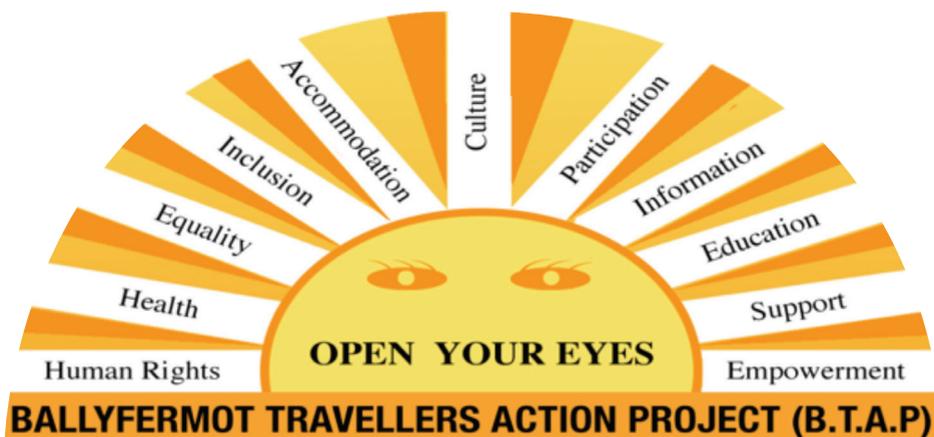


Summary of Project Report

Developing Community Based Strategies for Responding to Conflict

**an Innovative Project
with Ballyfermot Travellers Action Project**

by John Mulligan Breakthrough Consultancy 2015



Acknowledgements

This report was made possible as a result of the tireless work of an extraordinary practitioner whose expertise, skills, analysis, wisdom and creativity were shared generously throughout the programme of work and in the writing of the report.

That practitioner is John Mulligan (Breakthrough Consultancy) who devised and facilitated a programme of work to develop the capacity of BTAP, its board and staff and members of the community of Labre Park in developing strategies to respond to conflict. Through his commitment, openness and generosity, John continually adapted the programme to work where people were at and ensure he met the needs of individuals, the organization and a community within an ever changing environment.

John challenged us with new concepts and ideas and enlightened us to new possibilities through ongoing encouragement, guidance, mentoring and support for which we are indebted. He gave far beyond what our limited budget could ever resource and we offer our sincere appreciation.

We gratefully acknowledge the residents of Labre Park who embarked on a project of the unknown, who gave of their time and invested trust in BTAP and John to create the space for collective dialogue to explore and address issues of tension and conflict impacting on the community.

We are thankful for the financial support of St Stephens Green Trust which made it possible to implement the project over two years and to write and publish the report, the Irish Traveller Movement for financial assistance, support and collaboration on the project and the Ballyfermot Citizens Information service.

Board and Staff - BTAP

Conflict is natural and inevitable.
How we respond to it is not.
Our response can be constructive or destructive.
The choice is ours.

John Mulligan 2015

Executive summary:

The Project

Developing Community based strategies for responding to conflict was an innovative project to improve the ways conflict was being handled by Travellers based in Labre Park, Dublin. The project set out to explore, develop and establish a community-based conflict management system for and with residents of Labre Park and other stakeholders.

This executive summary accompanies a very detailed report of the overall project. The detailed report is for Traveller organisations, their Boards and staff and others interested in exploring or embarking on projects to address tensions and conflict with their communities. The report will also be of interest to conflict professionals, policy makers and academics who are concerned with relationships and conflict in the community.

The full report and recommendations set out the context, stories and reflections on the conflict work undertaken at BTAP between 2012 and 2014. It provides some detail on the principles, processes, practices and thinking which underpinned it. The report aims to provide guidance for Traveller projects or groups, who may never have undertaken any conflict work. It will provide greater understanding of the challenges entailed, of what is possible in dealing with Traveller conflict and how a community might go about it themselves.

The full report outlines some key achievements - what worked well and not so well - and highlights the need for further research and the development of further resources for projects.

The overall project placed particular emphasis on the engagement and participation of Traveller men living in Labre Park. Project objectives were to:

- create a safe space to explore the issues of conflict.
- build the capacity of the community to anticipate, prevent or respond to issues of conflict.
- work with all stakeholders to develop a community-based conflict management system appropriate to the needs and culture of the community.

Key strands of project

The overall project had four interconnected key strands. Each strand is discussed in detail within the full report along with descriptions of the work carried out, the analysis and learning.

The four key strands were;

1. the Board and Staff of BTAP

- a. raising conflict awareness and how to respond to it;
- b. addressing board and staff conflicts and contentious issues faced by the board;
- c. building conflict competence.

2. Labre Park Residents and Traveller men

- a. raising and addressing of important and contentious issues through residents meetings;
- b. engagement of Traveller men in community improvement and community decision making;
- c. resolving disputes non-violently between residents.

3. Traveller boys and a local business

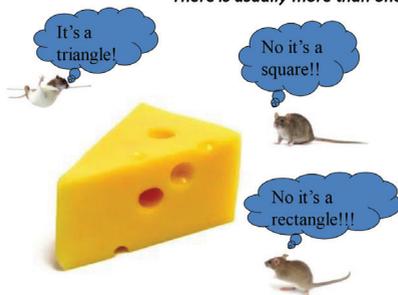
- a. engaging young boys and their parents in alternative dispute resolution processes;
- b. using restorative practices to address conflict between Traveller boys and a local business owner;
- c. gaining trust of residents,
- d. Business owner and other stakeholders seen value of restorative approaches to community conflict.

4. Service agencies and other stakeholders

- a. hosting a BTAP convened solution focused interagency group to address conflicts within the community and between the Traveller and settled community;
- b. using conflict communication and relationship tools to work with other groups and agencies to improve relationships and bring about change in local policies and practices.

Perceptual positions and framing

There is usually more than one story!



Combinations of different methods for managing, resolving and transforming conflict were used during the project. Building the conflict competence of participants formed the core strategy for the project though this was adapted and refined as the project progressed. Mediation, conflict coaching and restorative practice methods were used to complement and strengthen existing community development practices as required in response to emergent needs and within the constraints of resources.

The focus of many of these methods was on conflict and the value these methods could bring when applied in the context of community development. However, they are essentially advanced communication and relationship practices that can illuminate communication and relationship breakdown and how to respond constructively and repair it when and where ever it occurs in a wide variety of interpersonal, family, community and organisational settings.

Need for the Project

The need for this work was manifold. An outbreak of anti social behaviour and violence had a massively negative impact on Traveller community, wellbeing as well as material damage in Labre Park, but this was the tip of the iceberg.

The outbreak was symptomatic of a much larger breakdown of communication and relationship within Labre Park and with the settled community that had never been repaired despite extensive community development work. Painful memories, fears of recurrence and unresolved conflict within Labre Park were getting in the way of resident engagement in community development including the much needed repair and regeneration of Labre Park.

The community was fragmented and trust, communication and relationships needed to be repaired and rebuilt so the community could work effectively together to address the problems and challenges they faced.

The project was aimed at addressing some of these challenges.

Project findings

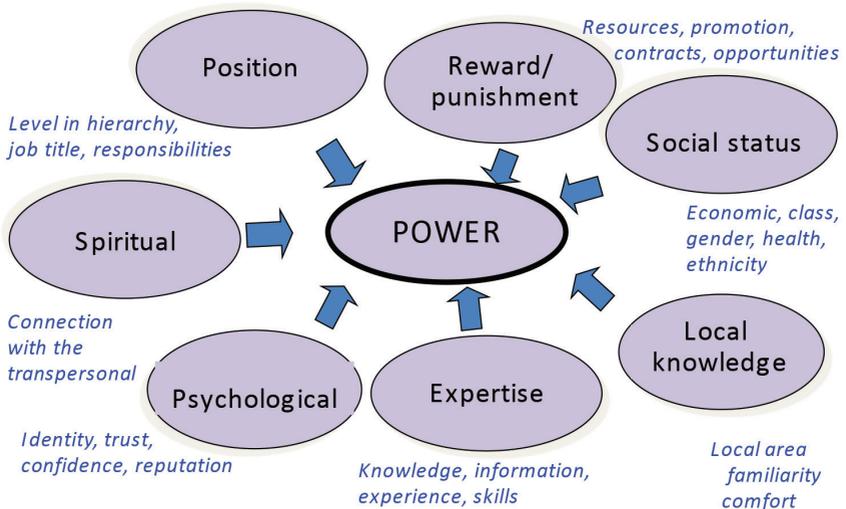
The main report covers in great detail the overall findings, the analysis and learning from the project. Below are some of the core findings which emerged through the process of work.

- the damaging effects and consequences of unresolved conflict on individuals, families and the Traveller community in Labre Park and their relations with the wider community.
- the need to extend our understanding of conflict, e.g. to illuminate communication and relationship breakdowns in different contexts.
- the benefits of developing a community-based approach to managing and resolving conflict
- the importance of integrating conflict awareness and capacity into the everyday work of the project
- the necessity of combining a variety of methods for working with conflict

in the community rather than over-relying on a single approach.

- the need to allow sufficient time to develop and embed conflict awareness and practices within Traveller projects
- the requirement for leadership from project Boards and staff in prioritising and committing to community-based conflict work and modelling good practice
- the value of developing a partnership approach together with other stakeholders to create an integrated community based conflict management system.
- the need for adequate resources and structural support over a period of years to contain, prevent, manage and resolve a range of conflicts at community level.

Sources of power and rank



What project boards can do embarking on conflict work

Developing Community Based Strategies for responding to Conflict was innovative and ground breaking work for BTAP. There was no accessible information or indeed guide to inform the organisation what needed to be done, how they would go about it or what they needed to be aware of at the outset.

This is one of the reasons BTAP decided to record and disseminate the learning so others interested in similar work could learn and hopefully benefit from BTAP's experience.

The following is a list of core actions that a board/group/organisation intending to embark on similar work need to be mindful of.

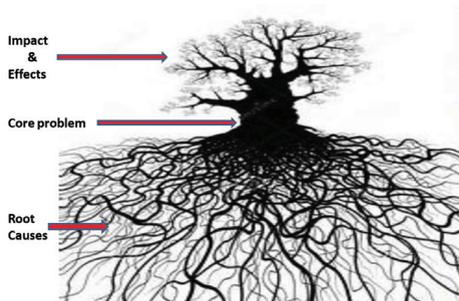
What the Board can do:

1. Educate itself about the everyday nature of conflict and its relevance, impacts and the potential benefits to Board and community of addressing it.
2. Prioritise working on conflict in Project's policy, strategy and work-plan, create steering group to lead it.
3. Steering group build shared vision with Board of outcomes you are trying to achieve through conflict work (with outside help where needed)
4. Set community expectations - how you will engage with them, naming the issues, keeping them informed.
5. Deepen Boards understanding of conflict dynamics and analysis of issues, approaches for preventing, managing and resolving conflict.
6. Develop policy and action plan: agree priorities, strategy, and milestones for implementing plan
7. Disseminate information on action plan - identify confidential designated person(s) as access point.
8. Members show leadership in promoting vision, modelling conflict competence
9. Create a safe space within community for Travellers to work on conflict
10. Identify challenges / manage risks entailed in dealing with the challenges.
11. Prepare to handle potential challenges, attacks and criticism / develop own conflict competence
12. Action learning – monitor and gather learning as initiative continues, adapt as appropriate and share learning

13. Speak out/ advocate conflict management vision and good practice, be at the front, use own position and power, support/ encourage members to pick up challenges
14. Integrate conflict work perspective within everyday community development activities of project
15. Raise awareness of services and agencies regarding their role in creating/ sustaining conflict and invite collaboration around creation of an integrated community conflict management system.
16. Celebrate successes and best practices in addressing tension and conflict and benefits to community and parties.
17. Liaise with National organisations for support and partnership in advocating and campaigning for policy/practice changes. This is not an exhaustive list and the full report on the work comprises a range of resource materials providing detailed information on the following areas;

- How the board can take on the work
- Steps for approaching escalated conflict
- Preventing conflict and conflict escalation
- Managing Conflict
- Resolving Conflict
- Transforming conflict
- Developing a community based conflict management system

The Conflict Tree: joint problem exploration



Recommendations

The main report details recommendations under five core areas; Planning, Resources, Implementation, Review/monitoring, Sustainability. The following are some of the key recommendations under each area;

Planning

- A. Prioritise leadership and board development and integrate conflict work closely with leadership and teamwork on the Boards.
- B. Agree a code of practice/ a set of values/principles for dealing with conflict
- C. Conflict proof each aspect of project work
- D. Build in specific healthy conflict practices, in line with declared code of behaviour, into the everyday activity and work of the project.
- E. Identify an ICCMS or “conflict capacity champion” to lead the project and coordinate activities
- F. Facilitate the Board and staff to learn more about conflict and consider the various options available to it.
- G. Board decide on their strategy for addressing conflict or at least the next steps.
- H. Board considers what the role of the Board should be in relation to conflict.
- I. Restorative principles practices should form a central platform for the delivery of community based conflict management services.
- J. Review what kind of capacity building programme is needed and how it can best be implemented in light of existing levels of commitment and resources.
- K. A nationally accessible Boards conflict capability training programme is developed for project Boards and Staff.

Resources

- A. Projects need to be realistic about what time and energy can be committed by Board, members and staff.
- B. More detailed guidance and workbooks are needed to assist projects implement the models, tools and practices outlined here.
- C. It is strongly recommended therefore that ITM and Breakthrough build on what has been achieved by sourcing sufficient funding to develop existing and further materials to publication standard
- D. ITM seek resources to employ a project worker over a period of 3 to 5 years to support the development of integrated community-based conflict management systems with in Traveller projects.

- E. Train Traveller volunteers and project staff members as mediators/ conflict facilitators on Traveller specific training programmes such as that being pioneered under the Roma and Traveller mediator training initiative currently being implemented in several EU countries.

Implementation

- A. All Board and members attend a conflict capability training programme together having considered what will best suit their needs.
- B. Consideration needs to be given as to how expert and voluntary mediation, restorative justice and conflict coaching support/service can be accessed locally on a partnership basis.
- C. Introduce and use structured community based methods and tools to enable greater collective awareness, engagement and ownership of tensions and conflict.
- D. Clarify and communicate the pathways available to members of the community for dealing with conflict through the project and how to access them.
- E. Use a conflict monitoring tool to help raise awareness of conflict vision and aspirations, successful practice and focus of implementation actions.
- F. Review relationships with state agencies and local authorities and explore how dysfunctional or adversarial type relationships and Traveller advocacy could be improved by the application of positive conflict communication principles and practices.
- G. Explore with interagency group how recurrent asocial and offensive behaviour could be addressed using solution oriented approach.
- H. Projects take the initiative to approach or invite local community groups or businesses impacted by Traveller related anti-social behaviour to explore and participate in addressing mutual needs and shared problems.
- I. A clear and accessible administrative structure and communications strategy is needed to process requests for assistance, coordinate services and disseminate information about services and how the community can access them.

Review/monitoring

- A. Agree how it will monitor and hold itself and its members accountable for implementing and consolidating of agreed code of practice/ values and principles.
- B. A national review and monitoring structure to support ICCMS projects around the country is recommended to negotiate high level agreements in relation to gaining buy-in and support for ICCMS.

Sustainability

- A. Projects need to focus on accessing and building partnerships with local voluntary mediation and restorative justice/practices services.
- B. Traveller Projects consider how best to participate in and contribute to national conference of Traveller organisations to review this report, share learning and discuss how it might be advanced and determine future action and or research needed.
- C. Projects consider the viability of small Traveller organisations and the potential for collaboration with other projects in relation to and their ability to host an ICCMS.
- D. Conduct further research on Traveller sensitive ways of working on conflict that take account of non-state and State allegiances.
- E. Dept. of Justice and Equality provide central/ structural support for projects to develop sustainable Integrated Community-based Conflict Management Systems.

The full report contains a “tool kit” which provides a range of resource materials for conflict work to help projects improve their communication and relationships and to develop an understanding of some of the core elements, principles, processes and tools for conflict work.

The “tool kit” comprises materials on

- Goals of conflict work with Travellers
- Theories and concepts of conflict
- What project boards can do
- Different ways of handling conflict
- Theories that explain and guide conflict work
- Collective models and tools for conflict work
- Individual conflict skills and practices
- Alternative definitions of conflict
- Principles and practices in conflict work
- A brief overview of Restorative practices
- Bibliography and web resources links

Conclusion

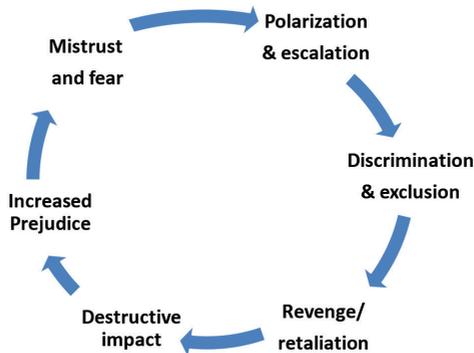
It is probably stating the obvious, but perhaps it needs to be said again. The language of conflict is problematic yet it is only by focusing upon and studying such contentious interactions that we can figure out where the breakdowns in communication and relationship which underlie and sustain conflict occur.

It is only in this way we discover what we could have done that would have been better, more constructive or at least less destructive. Our real interest is in better communication and relationship skills and strategy so the breakdowns are less likely to occur or we can repair them quickly before they escalate and become damaging.

Once learned, we need to build these into the fabric of our day to day interactions whether in family, community or organisation so we can improve the quality of our lives and work together. This is the ultimate goal of this work.

This summary and the full report aims to share our learning and, hopefully, speed up yours. We recommend you read the full report.

Self-reinforcing cycle: conflict & marginalization





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