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Interactive Problem-solving: Informal Mediation by the Scholar-Practitioner

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Introduction

For some years, my colleagues and I have been actively engaged in the development and application of an approach to the resolution of international conflicts for which we use the term 'interactive problem-solving'. The fullest – indeed, the paradigmatic – application of the approach is represented by problem-solving workshops (Kelman, 1972, 1979, 1992, 1996b; Kelman and Cohen, 1986), although it involves a variety of other activities as well. In fact, I have increasingly come to see interactive problem-solving as an approach to the macro-processes of international conflict resolution, in which problem-solving workshops and similar micro-level activities are integrally related to official diplomacy (Kelman, 1996a).

The approach derives most directly from the work of John Burton (1969, 1979, 1984). While my work follows the general principles laid out by Burton, it has evolved in its own directions, in keeping with my own disciplinary background, my particular style, and the cases on which I have focused my attention. My work has concentrated since 1974 on the Arab–Israeli conflict, and particularly on the Israeli–Palestinian component of that conflict. I have also done some work, however, on the Cyprus conflict and have maintained an active interest in several other intense, protracted identity conflicts at the international or intercommunal level, such as the conflicts in Bosnia, Sri Lanka, and Northern Ireland.

Interactive problem-solving

Interactive problem-solving – as manifested particularly in problem-solving workshops – is an academically based, unofficial third-party approach, bringing together representatives of parties in conflict for direct communication.

The third party typically consists of a panel of social scientists who, among them, possess expertise in group process and international conflict, and at least some familiarity with the conflict region. The role of the third party in our model differs from that of the traditional mediator. Unlike many mediators, we do not propose (and certainly, unlike arbitrators, we do not impose) solutions. Rather, we try to facilitate a process whereby solutions will emerge out of the interaction between the parties themselves. The task of the third party is to provide the setting, create the atmosphere, establish the norms, and offer the occasional interventions that make it possible for such a process to evolve.

Although the distinguishing feature of the approach (in contrast, for example, to traditional mediation) is direct communication between the parties, the objective is not to promote communication or dialogue as an end in itself. Problem-solving workshops are designed to promote a special type of communication – to be described below – with a very specific political purpose. Problem-solving workshops are closely linked to the larger political process. Selection of participants and definition of the agenda, for example, are based on careful analysis of the current political situation within and between the conflicting parties. Moreover, the objective of workshops is to generate inputs into the political process, including the decision-making process itself and the political debate within each of the communities. Most broadly stated, workshops try to contribute to creating a political environment conducive to conflict resolution and to transformation of the relationship between the conflicting parties – both in the short term and in the long term.

Practically speaking, this emphasis usually means that problem-solving workshops are closely linked to negotiation in its various phases, although negotiation does not by any means fully encompass the process of changing international relationships (see Saunders, 1988). In our work on the Israeli–Palestinian conflict in earlier years, problem-solving workshops were designed to contribute to the prenegotiation process: to creating a political atmosphere that would encourage the parties to move to the negotiating table. Thus, in planning and following up on workshops, we focused on the barriers that stood in the way of opening negotiations and on ways of overcoming such barriers – for example, through mutual reassurance. With the beginning of official Israeli–Palestinian negotiations in the fall of 1991, our focus of necessity shifted (Rouhana and Kelman, 1994). During the active negotiation phase, workshops can contribute to overcoming obstacles to staying at the table and negotiating effectively, to exploring options for resolving issues that are not yet on the table, to reframing such issues so as to make them more amenable to negotiation, and to beginning the process of peace-building that must accompany and follow the process of peacemaking. Workshops can also be of value in the postnegotiation phase, where they can contribute to implementation of the negotiated agreement and to long-term peace-building.

Despite the close link between workshops and negotiations, we have been very clear in emphasizing that workshops are not to be confused with negotiations as such. They are not meant to be negotiations, or simulated negotiations, or rehearsals for negotiations, nor are they meant to serve as substitutes for negotiations. Rather, they are meant to be complementary to negotiations.

Binding agreements can only be achieved through official negotiations. The very binding character of official negotiations, however, makes it very difficult for certain other things to happen in that context – such as the exploration and discovery of the parties' basic concerns, their priorities, their limits. This is where problem-solving workshops – precisely because of their non-binding character – can make a special contribution to the larger process of negotiation and conflict resolution. This special relationship to the negotiation process underlines one of the central differences between interactive problem-solving and traditional mediation: Problem-solving workshops are generally not designed to facilitate or influence the official negotiation process directly, although they do play a significant indirect role. Insofar as we mediate, it is not between the negotiators representing the two parties, but between their political communities. What we try to facilitate is not the process of negotiation itself, but communication that helps the parties overcome the political, emotional, and at times technical barriers that often prevent them from entering into negotiations, from reaching agreement in the course of negotiations, or from changing their relationship after a political agreement has been negotiated.

Central features of problem-solving workshops

Until the fall of 1990, the Israeli–Palestinian workshops we organized were all self-contained, one-time events. Some of the participants were involved in more than one workshop and many were involved in a variety of other efforts at communication across the conflict line. For these and other reasons, there was continuity between these separate events and they seem to have had a cumulative effect in helping to create a political environment conducive to negotiations. However, because of logistical and financial constraints and a lack of political readiness, we made no attempt before 1990 to reconvene the same group of participants over a series of meetings.

In the fall of 1990, Nadim Rouhana and I convened our first continuing workshop with a group of high-level, politically influential Israelis and Patestinians. The full group met five times between November 1990 and August 1993 – a period that included the Persian Gulf crisis and war, the beginning of official negotiations, and the election of a Labor party government in Israel (see Rouhana and Kelman 1994).[1] After the Oslo agreement (September 1993), Rouhana and I initiated a new project, a Joint Working Group on Israeli–Palestinian Relations (see Kelman, 1996b). This group began meeting in 1994 and held a total of 15 plenary meetings and

a number of sub-committee meetings between the spring of 1994 and the summer of 1999. In contrast to our earlier workshop efforts, the working group was designed to generate and disseminate concrete products in the form of a series of concept papers on final-status issues in the Israeli–Palestinian negotiations and on the long-term relationship between the two societies.[2] The group published three papers: one on general principles for the final-status negotiations (Joint Working Group, 1999), one on the problem of Palestinian refugees and the right of return (Alpher and Shikaki *et al.*, 1999), and one on the future Israeli–Palestinian relationship (Joint Working Group, 2000). A fourth paper, on Israeli settlements, is close to completion, but there are no immediate plans to publish it.

To provide a more concrete sense of problem-solving workshops and their underlying logic, I shall describe the format of a typical one-time workshop. It should be stressed, however, that most workshops are in fact 'atypical' in one or more respects. Workshops (including continuing workshops) conform to a set of fundamental principles, but they vary in some of their details, depending on the particular occasion, purpose, and set of participants. What I am presenting, then, is a composite picture, which most workshops approximate but do not necessarily correspond to in all details.

Most of our one-time workshops have been held at Harvard University, under the auspices of the Center for International Affairs or in the context of my graduate seminar on international conflict. Workshop sessions usually take place in a seminar room, with participants seated at a round table, although in some cases we have used a living-room setting or a private meeting room at a hotel. The typical workshop is a private, confidential event, without audience or observers. The discussions are not taped, but members of the third party take notes.

Participants in an Israeli–Palestinian workshop usually include three to six members of each party, as well as three to eight third-party members. The numbers have been smaller on some occasions. For example, I have arranged a number of one-on-one meetings, with the participation of one or two third-party members. These meetings have served important purposes and have retained many important features of problem-solving workshops, although one major feature – intra-party interaction – is missing. In quite a few of our workshops, the size of the third party has been larger than eight. As an integral feature of my graduate seminar on international conflict, I organized an annual workshop, in which the seminar participants – usually about twenty in number – served as apprentice members of the third party. Only eight third-party members sat around the table at any one session, however: three 'permanent' members (including myself and two colleagues with workshop experience) and five seminar participants on a rotating basis. When they were not around the table, the seminar participants were able to follow the proceedings (with the full knowledge of the parties, of course) from an adjoining room with a one-way mirror.

They were fully integrated into the third party: They took part in all of the workshop activities (pre-workshop sessions, briefings, breaks, meals, a social gathering) and were always bound by the requirements and discipline of the third-party role. Apart from the large size of the third party, the workshops linked to this graduate seminar were similar to 'regular' workshops in their purpose and format, and were widely seen as not just academic exercises, but serious political encounters.

The Israeli and Palestinian participants in workshops are all politically active and involved members of the mainstream of their respective communities. Many, by virtue of their positions or general standing, can be described as politically influential. Depending on the occasion and the political level of the participants, we may discuss our plans for a workshop with relevant elements of the political leadership on both sides, in order to keep them informed, gain their support, and solicit their advice on participants and agenda. For many potential workshop participants, approval and at times encouragement from the political leadership is a necessary condition for their agreement to take part. Recruitment, however, is generally done on an individual basis and participants are invited to come as individuals rather than as formal representatives. Invitees, of course, may consult with their leadership or with each other before agreeing to come. Whenever possible, we start the recruitment process with one key person on each side; we then consult with that person and with each successive invitee in selecting the rest of the team. At times, the composition of a team may be negotiated within the particular community (or subcommunity) that we approach, but the final invitation is always issued by the third party to each individual participant.

As an essential part of the recruitment process, we almost always discuss the purposes, procedures, and ground rules of the workshop personally with each participant before obtaining her or his final commitment. Whenever possible, this is done during a face-to-face meeting, although at times it is necessary to do it over the telephone. In addition to the individual briefings, we generally organize two pre-workshop sessions, in which the members of each party meet separately with the third party. In these sessions, which generally last four to five hours, we first review the purposes, procedures, and ground rules of the workshop. We then ask the participants to talk about their side's perspective on the conflict, the range of views within their community, the current status of the conflict as they see it and the conditions and possibilities for resolving it, and their conceptions of the needs and positions of the other side. We encourage the participants to discuss these issues among themselves. We make it clear that the role of the third party – even in the pre-workshop session – is to facilitate the exchange, in part through occasional questions and comments, but not to enter into the substantive discussion or to debate and evaluate what is being said.

The pre-workshop sessions fulfill a number of important functions. They provide an opportunity for the participants to become acquainted with the setting, the third party, and those members of their own team whom they had not previously met, without having to confront the other party at the same time; to raise questions about the purposes, procedures, and ground rules of the workshop; to begin to practice the type of discourse that the workshop is trying to encourage; to gain a better understanding of the role of the third party; and to 'do their duty' by telling the third party their side of the story and enumerating their grievances, thus reducing the pressure to adhere to the conflict norms in the course of the workshop itself. The pre-workshop sessions also give the third party an opportunity to observe some of the internal differences within each team, and to compare the ways in which the parties treat the issues when they are alone and when they are together.

The workshops themselves generally last two-and-a-half days, often taking place over an extended weekend. The opening session, typically late Friday afternoon, begins with a round of introductions, in which the participants are encouraged to go beyond their professional credentials and say something about their reasons for coming. We then review, once again, the purposes, procedures, and ground rules of the workshop, stressing the principles of privacy and confidentiality, the nature of the discourse that we are trying to encourage, and the role of the third party. This review, in the presence of all of the participants, serves to emphasize the nature of the contract to which all three parties are committing themselves. After dinner, shared by the entire group, we reconvene for the first substantive session. On the second day, we have two sessions (each lasting one-and-a-half hours) in the morning, with a half-hour coffee break in between. The same pattern is repeated after lunch. That evening, there is a dinner and social gathering for all participants, typically held at the home of the Kelmans. On the third day, there are again two sessions in the morning and two in the afternoon, and the workshop closes late that afternoon. Thus, in addition to the ten sessions around the table, the workshops provide ample opportunities for informal interaction during meals and coffee breaks. Sometimes participants create additional opportunities for themselves.

In opening the first substantive session, the third party – after describing the political context and the focus of the workshop – proposes a loose agenda. The specific agenda must depend, of course, on the stage of the conflict and the character of the group. The agenda followed in most of our workshops prior to 1992 was appropriate for initial workshops (i.e. workshops whose participants were convening for the first time as a group) in a conflict that was still in a pre-negotiation phase. The main task that we have set for our workshop participants in recent years has been to generate – through their interaction – ideas for bringing the parties to the negotiating table, or for negotiating more productively if they are already at the table. To get the interaction started, we ask the participants to describe their view of the conflict and its current status, to define the spectrum of positions *vis-à-vis* the conflict in their own societies, and to place themselves along that spectrum.

We try to move as rapidly as possible from this more conventional, descriptive discussion into the analytic, problem-solving mode of interaction that is at the heart of the agenda. First, we ask the participants on both sides to talk about their central concerns: the fundamental needs that an agreement would have to satisfy and the fundamental fears that it would have to allay in order to be acceptable to their communities. Only after both sets of concerns are on the table and each side's concerns have been understood by the other, are the participants asked to explore the overall shape of a solution that would meet the needs and calm the fears of both sides. Each is expected to think actively about solutions that would be satisfactory to the other, not only to themselves. Next, the participants are asked to discuss the political and psychological constraints that make it difficult to implement such solutions. Finally, the discussion turns to the question of how these constraints can best be overcome and how the two sides can support each other in such an effort. Depending on how much time is left and on the prevailing mood, the participants may try to come up with concrete ideas for unilateral, coordinated, or joint actions – by themselves or their communities – that might help overcome the barriers to negotiating a mutually satisfactory solution.

The agenda described here is not followed rigidly, but rather serves as a broad framework for the interaction. The discussions are relatively unstructured and, insofar as possible, are allowed to maintain their natural flow. We are careful not to intervene excessively or prematurely, and not to cut off potentially fruitful discussions because they appear to be deviating from the agenda. If the discussion goes too far afield, becomes repetitive, or systematically avoids the issues, the third party – usually with the help of at least some of the participants – will try to bring it back to the broad agenda. In general, the third party is prepared to intervene in order to help keep the discussion moving along productive, constructive channels. At times, particularly at the beginning or at the end of sessions, we also make substantive interventions, in order to help interpret, integrate, clarify, or sharpen what is being said or done in the group. On the whole, however, the emphasis in our model is on facilitating the emergence of ideas out of the interaction between the participants themselves. Consistent with that emphasis, we try to stay in the background as much as possible once we have set the stage.

Having drawn a general picture of the format and proceedings of a typical workshop, let me now highlight some of the special features of the approach.

Academic context

In my colleagues' and my third-party efforts, our academic base provides the major venue of our activities and source of our authority and credibility. The academic context has several advantages for our enterprise. It allows the parties to interact with each other in a relatively non-committal way, since the setting is not only unofficial, but also known as one in which people engage in free exchange of views, in playful consideration of new ideas, and in 'purely academic' discussions. Thus, an academic setting is a good place to set into motion a process of successive approximations, in which parties that do not trust each other begin to communicate in a non-committal framework, but gradually move to increasing levels of commitment as their level of working trust increases (Kelman, 1982). Another advantage of the academic context is that it allows us to call upon an alternative set of norms to counteract the norms that typically govern interactions between conflicting parties. Academic norms favor open discussion, attentive listening to opposing views, and an analytical approach, in contrast to the polemical, accusatory, and legalistic approach that conflict norms tend to promote.

Nature of interaction

The setting, norms, ground rules, agenda, procedures, and third-party interventions in problem-solving workshops are all designed to facilitate a kind of interaction that differs from the way parties in conflict usually interact – if they interact at all. Within the workshop setting, participants are encouraged to talk to each other, rather than to their constituencies or to third parties, and to listen to each other – not in order to discover the weaknesses in the other's argument, but in order to penetrate the other's perspective. The principles of privacy and confidentiality – apart from protecting the interests of the participants – are designed to protect this process, by reducing the participants' concern about how each word they say during the workshop will be perceived on the outside. In order to counteract the tendency to speak to the record, we have avoided creating a record, in the form of audio or videotapes or formal minutes. The absence of an audience, and the third party's refusal to take sides, to evaluate what is said, to adjudicate differences, or to become involved in the debate of substantive issues, further encourages the parties to focus on each other, rather than attempt to influence external parties. These features of the workshop are in no way designed to encourage the participants to forget about their constituencies or, for that matter, about relevant third parties; ideas generated in workshops must be acceptable to the two communities, as well as to outside actors, if they are to have the desired impact on the political process. Rather, these features are designed to prevent the intrusion of these actors into the workshop interaction itself, thus inhibiting and distorting the generation of new ideas.

A second central element in the nature of the interaction that workshops try to promote is an analytic focus. Workshop discussions are analytical in the sense that participants try to gain a better understanding of the other's – and indeed of their own – concerns, needs, fears, priorities, and constraints, and of the way in which the divergent perspectives of the parties help to feed and escalate their conflict. It is particularly important for each party to gain an understanding of the other's perspective (without accepting that perspective) and of the domestic dynamics that shape the policy debate in each community. To appreciate the constraints under which the other operates is especially difficult in a conflict relationship, since the parties' thinking tends to be dominated by their own constraints. But an analytic understanding of the constraints – along with the fundamental concerns – that inform the other's perspective is a *sine qua non* for inventing solutions that are feasible and satisfactory for both sides.

Analytical discussions proceed on the basis of a 'no fault' principle. While there is no presumption that both sides are equally at fault, the discussions are not oriented toward assigning blame, but toward exploring the causes of the conflict and the obstacles to its resolution. This analytical approach is designed to lead to a problem-solving mode of interaction, based on the proposition that the conflict represents a joint problem for the two parties that requires joint efforts at solution.

Dual purpose

Workshops have a dual purpose, which can be described as educational and political. They are designed to produce both *changes* in attitudes, perceptions, and ideas for resolving the conflict among the individual participants in the workshop, and *transfer* of these changes to the political arena – i.e. to the political debate and the decision-making process within each community. The political purpose is an integral part of the workshop approach, whatever the level of the participants involved. Workshops provide opportunities for the parties to interact, to become acquainted with each other, and to humanize their mutual images, not as ends in themselves, but as means to producing new learnings that can then be fed into the political process. Some of the specific learnings that participants have acquired in the course of workshops and then communicated to their own political leaderships or publics have included: information about the range of views on the other side, signs of readiness for negotiation, and the availability of potential negotiating partners; insights into the other side's priorities, rock-bottom requirements, and areas of flexibility; and ideas for confidence-building measures, mutually acceptable solutions to issues in conflict, and ways of moving to the negotiating table.

Because of their dual purpose, problem-solving workshops are marked by a dialectical character (Kelman, 1979; Kelman and Cohen, 1986). Some of the conditions favorable to change in the workshop setting may be

antagonistic to the transfer of changes to the political arena, and vice versa. There is often a need, therefore, to find the proper balance between contradictory requirements if a workshop is to be effective in fulfilling both its educational and its political purpose. For example, it is important for the participants to develop a considerable degree of working trust in order to engage in joint problem-solving, to devise direct or tacit collaborative efforts for overcoming constraints against negotiation, and to become convinced that there are potential negotiating partners on the other side. This trust, however, must not be allowed to turn into excessive camaraderie transcending the conflict, lest the participants lose their credibility and their potential political influence once they return to their home communities. Workshops can be seen as part of a process of building a coalition across the conflict line, but it must remain an uneasy coalition that does not threaten members' relationship to their own identity groups (Kelman, 1993).

The selection of participants provides another example of a central workshop feature for which the dialectics of the process have important implications. The closer the participants are to the centers of power in their own communities, the greater the likelihood that what they learn in the course of their workshop experience will be fed directly into the decision-making process. By the same token, however, the closer participants are to the centers of power, the more constrained they are likely to feel, and the greater their difficulty in entering into communication that is open, non-committal, exploratory, and analytical. Thus, on the whole, as participants move closer to the level of top decision-makers, they become less likely to show change as a result of their workshop experience, but whatever changes do occur are more likely to be transferred to the policy process. These contradictory effects have to be taken into account in selecting participants for a given occasion, or in defining the goals and agenda for a workshop with a given set of participants. In general, the best way to balance the requirements for change and for transfer is to select participants who are politically influential but not directly involved in the execution of foreign policy. The approach can be adapted for use with decision-makers themselves, as long as the facilitators are aware of the advantages and drawbacks of participants at that level.

The workshops and related encounters that we have organized over the years have included participants at three different levels of relationship to the decision-making process: political actors, such as parliamentarians, negotiators, party activists, or advisers to political leaders; political influentials, such as former officials and diplomats, senior academics (who are leading analysts of the conflict in their own communities and occasional advisers to decision-makers), community leaders, writers, or editors; and pre-influentials, such as younger academics and professionals or advanced graduate students, who are slated to move into influential positions in their respective fields. The lines between these three categories are not very

precise; moreover, many participants who may have been 'pre-influentials' at the time of their workshop have since become influential, and some of our 'influentials' have since become political actors. Whatever the level of the participants, a central criterion for selection is that they be politically involved – at least as active participants in the political debate and perhaps in political movements. From our point of view, even this degree of involvement is of direct political relevance since it contributes to the shaping of the political environment for any peace effort. Another criterion for selection is that participants be part of the mainstream of their community and that they enjoy credibility within broad segments of that community. We look for participants who are as close as possible to the center of the political spectrum, while at the same time being interested in negotiations and open to the workshop process. As a result, workshop participants so far have tended to be on the dovish ('moderate' or pro-negotiation) side of the center.

Third-party contributions

Although workshops proceed on the principle that useful ideas for conflict resolution must emerge out of the interaction between the parties themselves, the third party plays an essential role (at certain stages of a conflict) in making that interaction possible and fruitful. The third party provides the context in which representatives of parties engaged in an intense conflict are able to come together. It selects, briefs, and convenes the participants. It serves as a repository of trust for both parties, enabling them to proceed with the assurance that their confidentiality will be respected and their interests protected even though – by definition – they cannot trust each other. It establishes and enforces the norms and ground rules that facilitate analytic discussion and a problem-solving orientation. It proposes a broad agenda that encourages the parties to move from exploration of each other's concerns and constraints to the generation of ideas for win/win solutions and for implementing such solutions. It tries to keep the discussion moving in constructive directions. And, finally, it makes occasional substantive interventions in the form of content observations, which suggest interpretations and implications of what is being said and point to convergences and divergences between the parties, to blind spots, to possible signals, and to issues for clarification; process observations at the intergroup level, which suggest possible ways in which interactions between the parties 'here and now' may reflect the dynamics of the conflict between their communities; and theoretical inputs, which help participants distance themselves from their own conflict, provide them conceptual tools for analysis of their conflict, and offer them relevant illustrations from previous research.

Process observations are among the unique features of problem-solving workshops. They generally focus on incidents in which one party's words

or actions clearly have a strong emotional impact on the other – leading to expressions of anger and dismay, of relief and reassurance, of understanding and acceptance, or of reciprocation. The third party can use such incidents, which are part of the participants' shared immediate experience, as a springboard for exploring some of the issues and concerns that define the conflict between their societies. Through such exploration, each side can gain some insight into the preoccupations of the other, and the way these are affected by its own actions. Process observations must be introduced sparingly and make special demands on the third party's skill and sense of timing. It is particularly important that such interventions be pitched at the intergroup, rather than the interpersonal level. Analysis of 'here and now' interactions is not concerned with the personal characteristics of the participants or with their personal relations to each other, but only with what these interactions can tell us about the relationship between their national groups.

Social–psychological assumptions

The practice of interactive problem-solving is informed by a set of assumptions about the nature of international/intercommunal conflict and conflict resolution. These assumptions are meant to be general in nature, although they refer most directly to conflicts between identity groups and may not be equally applicable in other cases. The problem-solving approach is likely to be most relevant in conflicts in which identity issues play a central role and to which these assumptions most clearly refer.

In my particular conception of the problem-solving approach, the guiding assumptions derive from a social–psychological analysis, which provides a bridge between individual behavior and social interaction, on the one hand, and the functioning of social systems (organizations, institutions, societies) and collectivities, on the other (Kelman, 1997b). Social–psychological assumptions enter into the formulation of the structure, the process, and the content of problem-solving workshops.

Workshop structure

Workshop structure refers primarily to the role of workshops in the larger political context and their place within the social system in which the conflict is carried on. In effect, the focus here is on the relationship between the micro-process of the workshop and the macro-process of conflict management or resolution. Several assumptions underlie our view of this relationship and hence the way in which workshops are structured.

Conflict as an intersocietal process

International conflict is not merely an intergovernmental or interstate phenomenon, but also an intersocietal phenomenon. Thus, in addition to the strategic, military, and diplomatic dimensions, it is necessary to give central consideration to the economic, psychological, cultural, and social-structural dimensions in the analysis of the conflict. Interactions along these dimensions, both within and between the conflicting societies, form the essential political environment in which governments function. It is necessary to look at these intrasocietal and intersocietal processes in order to understand the political constraints under which governments operate and the resistance to change that these produce. By the same token, these societal factors, if properly understood and utilized, provide opportunities and levers for change.

This view has a direct implication for the selection of workshop participants. To be politically relevant, workshops do not require the participation of decision-makers or their agents. In fact, as proposed in the earlier discussion of the dual purposes and dialectical character of workshops, the ideal participants may be individuals who are politically influential but not directly involved in the foreign-policy decision-making process. The important consideration is that they be active and credible contributors to the political debate within their own communities and thus can play a role in changing the political environment.

Another implication of the view of international conflict as an intersocietal phenomenon is that third-party efforts should ideally be directed not merely to a settlement of the conflict, but to its resolution. A political agreement may be adequate for terminating relatively specific, containable interstate disputes, but it is an inadequate response to conflicts that engage the collective identities and existential concerns of the societies involved.

Conflict resolution as transformation of the relationship

Following from the stress on the intersocietal nature of conflict is the assumption that conflict resolution represents an effort to transform the relationship between the conflicting parties. This assumption has direct implications for the type of solutions that third-party intervention tries to generate. First, solutions must emerge out of the interaction between the parties themselves: The process of interactive problem-solving itself contributes to transforming the relationship between the parties. Secondly, solutions must address the needs of both parties, thus providing the foundation of a new relationship between them. Finally, the nature of the solutions and the process by which they were achieved must be such that the parties will be committed to them: Only thus can they establish a new relationship on a long-term basis.

Diplomacy as a mix of official and unofficial processes

Another corollary of the stress on the intersocietal nature of conflict is the view of diplomacy as a broad and complex mix of official and unofficial processes. The peaceful termination or management of conflicts requires

binding agreements that can only be achieved at the official level. Unofficial interactions, however, can play a constructive complementary role, particularly by contributing to the development of a political environment conducive to negotiations and other diplomatic initiatives (Saunders, 1988). Problem-solving workshops and other informal efforts, as pointed out at the beginning of the chapter, can make such contributions precisely because of their non-binding character. In such settings – in contrast to official fora – it is much easier for the parties to engage in non-committal, exploratory interactions, which allow them, for example, to test each other's limits, to develop empathy, or to engage in creative problem-solving. Accordingly, many of the features of problem-solving workshops are specifically geared to maximizing the non-committal nature of the interaction: the academic context; the assurance of privacy and confidentiality; the absence (at least in our earlier work) of expectations of specific products; and the emphasis on interactions characterized by exploration, sharing of perspectives, playing with ideas, brainstorming, and creative problem-solving – rather than bargaining.

Impact of intragroup conflict on intergroup conflict

A further assumption relates to the interplay between intragroup and intergroup conflict. In many international and intercommunal conflicts, internal divisions within each party shape the course of the conflict between the parties. This phenomenon represents a special instance of the general observation of continuities between domestic and international politics. Understanding of the internal divisions within each party is essential to the selection of workshop participants, since the political significance of workshops depends on the potential impact these participants can have on the internal debate. The internal divisions in each society are also a major focus of concern within workshops, particularly when the discussion turns to the political and psychological constraints against compromise solutions and ways of overcoming these constraints.

More generally, I have already alluded to my conceptualization (Kelman, 1993) of workshops and related activities as part of a process of forming a coalition across the conflict line – a coalition between those elements on each side that are interested in a negotiated solution. It is very important to keep in mind, however, that such a coalition must of necessity remain an uneasy coalition. If it became overly cohesive, it would undermine the whole purpose of the enterprise: to have an impact on the political decisions within the two communities. Workshop participants who become closely identified with their counterparts on the other side may become alienated from their own co-nationals, lose credibility, and hence forfeit their political effectiveness and their ability to promote a new consensus within their own communities. One of the challenges for problem-solving workshops, therefore, is to create an atmosphere in which participants can

begin to humanize and trust each other and to develop an effective collaborative relationship, without losing sight of their separate group identities and the conflict between their communities.

The world system as a global society

At the broadest level, my assumptions about international and intercommunal conflict rest on a view of the world system as a global society – a term used here not only normatively, but also descriptively. To be sure, the global society is a weak society, lacking many of the customary features of a society. Still, conceiving of the world as a society corrects for the untenable view of nation states as sole and unitary actors in the global arena. Clearly, nation spates remain the dominant actors within our current global society. The nation state benefits from the principle of sovereignty and from its claim to represent its population's national identity – perhaps the most powerful variant of group identity in the modern world. (In intercommunal conflicts within established nation states, the ethnic community is seen as representing the central element of identity and seeks to restructure, take over, or separate from the existing state in order to give political expression to that identity.) Despite the dominance of the nation state, the world system has many of the characteristics of a society: It is formed by a multiplicity of actors, including – in addition to nation states – individuals in their diverse roles, as well as a variety of subnational and supranational groups; it is marked by an ever-increasing degree of interdependence between its component parts; it is divided along many complex lines, with the nation state representing perhaps the most powerful, but certainly not the only cutting line; and it contains numerous relationships that cut across nation-state lines, including relations based on ethnicity, religion, ideology, occupation, and economic interests. The embeddedness of the nation state in a global society, in which ethnic and other bonds cut across nation-state lines, accounts in large part for the continuity between the domestic and foreign policies of the modern stable.

The view of the world system as a global society provides several angles for understanding the role of interactive problem-solving within a larger context of conflict resolution.

First, the concept of a global society with its emphasis on interdependence suggests the need for alternative conceptions of national and international security, which involve arrangements for common security and mechanisms for the nonviolent conduct, management, and resolution of conflicts. Such arrangements and mechanisms, in turn, call for the development of governmental, intergovernmental, and nongovernmental institutions to embody the emerging new conceptions of security. Interactive problem-solving can be seen as the germ of an independent (nongovernmental) institutional mechanism, which can contribute to security through the nonviolent resolution of conflicts.

Secondly, by focusing on multiple actors and cross-cutting relationships, the concept of a global society encourages us to think of unofficial diplomacy in all of its varieties as an integral part of diplomacy and of a larger process of conflict resolution, and not just as a side-show (as it tends to be viewed in a state-centered model).

Finally, the multiple-actor framework central to the concept of a global society provides a place for the individual as a relevant actor in international relations. Interactive problem-solving uses the individual as the unit of analysis in the effort to understand resistances to change in a conflict relationship despite changes in realties and interests, and in the search for solutions that would satisfy the human needs of the parties. Moreover, interactive problem-solving is a systematic attempt to promote change at the level of individuals (in the form of new insights and ideas) as a vehicle for change at the system level.

Workshop process

Several social-psychological assumptions underlie our view of the kind of interaction process that workshops are designed to promote.

Direct bilateral interaction

One assumption follows directly from the structural analysis that has just been presented – i.e. from the role of workshops in the larger political context. Somewhere within the larger framework of conflict resolution, there must be a place for direct, bilateral interaction between the parties centrally involved in a given conflict – such as the Israelis and the Palestinians, or the Greek and the Turkish Cypriots. Such direct, bilateral interactions are not a substitute for the multilateral efforts that are almost invariably required for the resolution of protracted conflicts. Greece and Turkey cannot be excluded from negotiations of the Cyprus conflict, nor can the Arab states and major world powers be bypassed in efforts to resolve the Israeli–Palestinian dispute. Within this larger framework, however, there must be an opportunity for the parties immediately involved – the parties that ultimately have to live with each other – to penetrate each other's perspective and to engage in joint problem-solving designed to produce ideas for a mutually satisfactory agreement between them.

Opportunities for interaction at the micro-level can also contribute some of the needed interactive elements at the macro-level: a binocular orientation, such that each party can view the situation from the other's perspective as well as from its own; a recognition of the need for reciprocity in the process and outcome of negotiations; and a focus on building a new relationship between the parties.

Emergent character of interaction

A second assumption underlying the workshop process is that products of social interaction have an emergent character. In the course of direct interaction, the parties are able to observe at first hand their differing reactions to the same events and the different perspectives these reflect; the differences between the way they perceive themselves and the way the other perceives them; and the impact that their statements and actions have on each other. Out of these observations, they can jointly shape new insights and ideas that could not have been predicted from what they brought to the interaction. Certain kinds of solutions to the conflict can emerge only from the confrontation of assumptions, concerns, and identities during face-to-face communication.

The emergence of ideas for solutions to the conflict out of the interaction between the parties (in contrast, for example, to ideas proposed by third parties) has several advantages: Such ideas are more likely to be responsive to the fundamental needs and fears of both parties; the parties are more likely to feel committed to the solutions they produce themselves; and the process of producing these ideas in itself contributes to building a new relationship between the parties.

In keeping with our assumption about the emergent character of interaction, we pay attention to the nature of the discourse during workshops (see Pearson, 1990): How does the way parties talk to each other change over the course of the workshop? What are the critical moments in a workshop that have an impact on the continuing interaction? How do new joint ideas come to be formulated in the course of the interaction?

Exploration and problem-solving

Workshops are designed to promote a special kind of interaction or discourse that can contribute to the desired political outcome. As noted in the earlier discussion of the nature of the interaction, the setting, ground rules, and procedures of problem-solving workshops encourage (and permit) interaction marked by the following elements: an emphasis on addressing each either (rather than one's constituencies, or third parties, or the record) and on listening to each other; analytical discussion; adherence to a 'no-fault' principle; and a problem-solving mode of interaction. This kind of interaction allows the parties to explore each other's concerns, penetrate each other's perspectives, and take cognizance of each other's constraints. As a result, they are able to offer each other the needed reassurances to engage in negotiation and to come up with solutions responsive to both sides' needs and fears.

The nature of the interaction fostered in problem-solving workshops has some continuities with a therapeutic model (Kelman, 1991b). The influence of the therapeutic model can be seen particularly in the facilitative role of the third party, the analytical character of the discourse, and the use of 'here and now' experiences as a basis for learning about the dynamics of the conflict (as mentioned in the earlier discussion of process observations). It is also important, however, to keep in mind the limited applicability of

a therapeutic model to problem-solving workshops. For example, the focus of workshops is not on individuals and their interpersonal relations, but on what can be learned from their interaction about the dynamics of the conflict between their communities. Furthermore, there is no assumption that nations can be viewed as equivalent to individuals or that conflict resolution is a form of therapy for national groups.

Establishment of alternative norms

The workshop process is predicated on the assumption that the interaction between conflicting parties is governed by a set of 'conflict norms' that contribute significantly to escalation and perpetuation of the conflict (Kelman, 1997b). There is a need, therefore, for interactions based on an alternative set of norms conducive to de-escalation. Workshops are designed to provide an opportunity for this kind of interaction. As noted earlier, the academic context provides an alternative set of norms on which the interaction between the parties can proceed. The ground rules for interaction within the workshop make it both possible and necessary for participants to abide by these alternative norms. The safe environment of the workshop and the principle of privacy and confidentiality provide the participants with the protection they need to be able to deviate from the conflict norms.

Individual change as vehicle for policy change

Finally, workshops operationalize a process that is social-psychological par excellence: a process designed to produce change in individuals, interacting in a small-group context, as a vehicle for change in policies and actions of the political system (Kelman, 1997a). Thus, workshops have a dual purpose – educational and political, or change and transfer – as discussed above in some detail. This dual purpose, at times, creates conflicting requirements that have to be balanced in order to fulfill both sets of purposes. I have already illustrated how such conflicts may affect the selection of workshop participants and the atmosphere of trust that workshops seek to engender. The relationship between change at the individual level and at the system level – which often lends a dialectical character to problem-solving workshops – is at the heart of the workshop process.

Workshop content

A set of social-psychological assumptions also inform the substantive emphases of workshop discussions. These emphases include human needs, perceptual and cognitive constraints on information processing, and influence processes, as these enter into conflict relationships.

Parties' needs and fears

The satisfaction of the needs of both parties – as articulated through their core identity groups – is the ultimate criterion in the search for a mutually satisfactory resolution of their conflict (Burton, 1990; Kelman, 1990). Unfulfilled needs, especially for identity and security, and existential fears about the denial of such needs typically drive the conflict and create barriers to its resolution. By pushing behind the parties' incompatible positions and exploring the identity and security needs that underlie them, it often becomes possible to develop mutually satisfactory solutions, since identity, security, and other psychological needs are not inherently zero-sum. Workshop interactions around needs and fears enable the parties to find a language and to identify gestures and actions that are conducive to mutual reassurance. Mutual reassurance is a central element of conflict resolution, particularly in existential conflicts where the parties see their group identity, their people's security, their very existence as a nation to be at stake.

Escalatory dynamics of conflict interaction

The needs and fears of parties involved in a conflict relationship impose perceptual and cognitive constraints on their processing of new information. One of the major effects of these constraints is that the parties systematically underestimate the occurrence and possibility of change and therefore avoid negotiations, even in the face of changing interests that would make negotiations desirable for both. Images of the enemy are particularly resistant to disconfirming information. The combination of demonic enemy images and virtuous self-images on both sides leads to the formation of mirror images, which contribute to the escalatory dynamic of conflict interaction and to resistance to change in a conflict relationship (Bronfenbrenner, 1961; White, 1965).

By focusing on mutual perceptions, mirror images, and systematic differences in perspective, workshop participants can learn to differentiate the enemy image – a necessary condition for movement toward negotiation (Kelman, 1987). Workshops bring out the symmetries in the parties' images of each other and in their positions and requirements, which arise out of the dynamics of the conflict interaction itself. Such symmetries are often overlooked because of the understandable tendency of protagonists in a conflict relationship to dwell on the asymmetries between them. Without denying these important asymmetries, both empirical and moral, we focus on symmetries because they tend to be a major source of escalation of conflict (as in the operation of conflict spirals) and a major reason for making the conflict intractable. By the same token, they can serve as a major vehicle for de-escalation by helping the parties penetrate each other's perspective and identify mutually reassuring gestures and actions (Kelman, 1978, 1991a).

Mutual influence in conflict relationships

Finally, the content of workshop discussions reflects an assumption about the nature of influence processes in international relations. Workshops are

predicated on the view that the range of influence processes employed in conflict relationships must be broadened. It is necessary to move beyond influence strategies based on threats and even to expand and refine strategies based on promises and positive incentives. By searching for solutions that satisfy the needs of both parties, workshops explore the possibility of mutual influence by way of responsiveness to each other's needs. A key element in this process, emphasized throughout this chapter, is mutual reassurance. In existential conflicts, in particular, parties can encourage each other to move to the negotiating table by reducing both sides' fear – not just, as more traditional strategic analysts maintain, by increasing their pain. At the macro-level, the present approach calls for a shift in emphasis in international influence processes from deterrence and compellence to mutual reassurance. The use of this mode of influence has the added advantage of not only affecting specific behaviors by the other party, but contributing to a transformation of the relationship between the parties.

The expanded conception of influence processes that can be brought to bear in a conflict relationship is based on a view of international conflict as a dynamic phenomenon, emphasizing the occurrence and possibility of change. Conflict resolution efforts are geared, therefore, to discovering possibilities for change, identifying conditions for change, and overcoming resistances to change. Such an approach favors 'best-case' analyses and an attitude of 'strategic optimism' (Kelman, 1978, 1979), not because of an unrealistic denial of malignant trends, but as part of a deliberate strategy to promote change by actively searching for and accentuating whatever realistic possibilities for peaceful resolution of the conflict might be on the horizon. Optimism, in this sense, is part of a strategy designed to create self-fulfilling prophecies of a positive nature, balancing the self-fulfilling prophecies of escalation created by the pessimistic expectations and the worst-case scenarios often favored by more traditional analysts. Problem-solving workshops can be particularly useful in exploring ways in which change can be promoted through the parties' own actions and in discovering ways in which each can exert influence on the other (Kelman, 1991a, 1997b).

Conclusion: relevance of interactive problem-solving

The principles of interactive problem-solving have some applicability in a wide range of international conflict situations. Indeed, I would argue that problem-solving workshops and related activities – along with other forms of unofficial diplomacy – should be thought of as integral parts of a larger diplomatic process. This type of intervention can make certain unique contributions to the larger process that are not available through official channels – for example, by providing opportunities for non-committal exploration of possible ways of getting to the table and of shaping

mutually acceptable solutions. Moreover, the assumptions and principles of interactive problem-solving can contribute to a reconceptualization of international relationships at the macro-level by encouraging shifts in the nature of the discourse and the means of influence that characterize international relations today (Kelman, 1996a). Nevertheless, it must be said that problem-solving workshops, particularly in the format that has evolved in our style of practice, are more directly relevant in some types of conflict than in others and at certain phases of a given conflict than at others.

Since my primary case has been the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, it is not surprising that my approach is most relevant to situations that share some of the characteristics of that conflict. The approach is most directly relevant to long-standing conflicts, in which the interests of the parties have gradually converged, and large segments of each community perceive this to be the case, but nevertheless they seem to be unable or unwilling to enter into negotiations or to bring the negotiations to a satisfactory conclusion. The psychological obstacles to negotiation in these cases are not readily overcome despite the changes in realities and in perceived interests.

Interactive problem-solving is not feasible if there is no interest among the parties – or significant elements within each party – in changing the *status quo*. It is not necessary if there are no profound barriers to negotiations; in that event, other forms of mediation – designed to enhance negotiating skills or to propose reasonable options – may be equally or more useful. However, when the recognition of common interests is insufficient to overcome the psychological barriers, interactive problem-solving becomes particularly germane. These conditions are likely to prevail in intense, protracted identity conflicts at the international or intercommunal level, particularly conflicts in which the parties see their national existence to be at stake. The Israeli–Palestinian conflict, the Cyprus conflict, and the conflicts in Northern Ireland and Sri Lanka, clearly share these characteristics. There are many other conflicts, however, that can benefit from a process designed to promote mutual reassurance and to help develop a new relationship between conflicting parties that must find a way of living together.

Since the goal of workshops is to help the parties translate their interest in changing the *status quo* into an effective negotiating process, by overcoming the barriers that stand in the way of such a process, it is necessary to select workshop participants from those segments of the two communities that are indeed interested in a negotiated agreement. They may be skeptical about the possibility of achieving such an agreement and suspicious about the intentions of the other side, but they must have some interest in finding a mutually acceptable way of ending the conflict. In addition, workshop participants must be prepared to meet and talk with members of the other community at a level of equality within the workshop setting, whatever asymmetries in power between the parties may

prevail in the relationship between the two communities. Thus, 'participants from the stronger party must be *willing* to deal with the other on a basis of equality, which generally means that they have come to accept the illegitimacy of past patterns of discrimination and domination; participants from the weaker must be *able* to deal with the other on a basis of equality, which generally means that they have reached a stage of confrontation in the conflict' (Kelman, 1990: 293–4). In their interactions within the workshop setting, it would be inappropriate for members of the stronger party to take advantage of their superior power, as they might in a negotiating situation. By the same token, it would be inappropriate in this setting for members of the weaker party to take advantage of their superior moral position, as they might in a political rally or an international conference. Workshop interactions are most productive when they are based on the principle of reciprocity.

As emphasized at the beginning of this chapter, workshops are not intended to substitute for official negotiations but they may be closely linked to the negotiating process. Thus, our work on the Israeli–Palestinian conflict during the pre-negotiation and early negotiation phases helped lay the groundwork for the Oslo agreement by contributing to the development of the cadres, the ideas, and the political atmosphere required for movement to the table and productive negotiation (Kelman, 1995, 1997c). At a point when active negotiations are in progress, workshops may provide a noncommittal forum to explore options, reframe issues to make them more amenable to negotiation, identify ways of breaking stalemates in the negotiations, and address setbacks in the process. They may also allow the parties to work out solutions to specific technical, political, or emotional issues that require an analytical, problem-solving approach; such solutions can then be fed into the formal negotiating process. In the post-negotiation phase, workshops can help the parties address issues in the implementation of the agreement and explore a new relationship based on patterns of coexistence and cooperation.

The Israeli–Palestinian workshops that we have conducted over the years have suggested some of the ways in which workshops and related activities can contribute to the peace process, helping the parties to overcome the fears and suspicions that keep them from entering into negotiations or from arriving at an agreement. Workshops can help the participants develop more differentiated images of the enemy and discover potential negotiating partners – to learn that there is someone to talk to on the other side and something to talk about. They can contribute to the formation of cadres of individuals who have acquired experience in communicating with the other side and the conviction that such communication can be fruitful. They enable the parties to penetrate each other's perspective, gaining insight into the other's concerns, priorities, and constraints. They increase awareness of change and thus contribute to creating and maintaining a

sense of possibility – a belief among the relevant parties that a peaceful solution is attainable and that negotiations toward such a solution are feasible.

Workshops also contribute to creating a political environment conducive to fruitful negotiations through the development of a de-escalatory language, based on sensitivity to words that frighten and words that reassure the other party. They help in the identification of mutually reassuring actions and symbolic gestures, often in the form of acknowledgments – of the other's humanity, national identity, ties to the land, history of victimization, sense of injustice, genuine fears, and conciliatory moves. They contribute to the development of shared visions of a desirable future, which help reduce the parties' fear of negotiations as a step into an unknown, dangerous realm. They may generate ideas about the shape of a positive-sum solution that meets the basic needs of both parties. They may also generate ideas about how to get from here to there – about a framework and set of principles for moving negotiations forward. Ultimately, problem-solving workshops contribute to a process of transformation of the relationship between enemies.

The continuing workshop that Nadim Rouhana and I convened between 1990 and 1993 (Rouhana and Kelman, 1994) enhanced the potential relevance of interactive problem-solving to the larger political process. A continuing workshop represents a sustained effort to address concrete issues, enabling us to push the process of conflict analysis and interactive problem solving farther and to apply it more systematically than can be done with self-contained, one-time workshops. The longer time period and the continuing nature of the enterprise make it possible to go beyond the sharing of perspectives to the joint production of creative ideas. Moreover, the periodic reconvening of a continuing workshop allows for an iterative and cumulative process, based on feedback and correction. The participants have an opportunity to take the ideas developed in the course of a workshop back to their own communities, to gather reactions, and to return to the next meeting with proposals for strengthening, expanding, or modifying the original ideas. It is also possible for participants, within or across parties, to meet or otherwise communicate with each other between workshop sessions in order to work out some of the ideas more fully and bring the results of their efforts back to the next session. Finally, a continuing workshop provides better opportunities to address the question of how to disseminate ideas and proposals developed at the workshop most effectively and appropriately.

The Joint Working Group on Israeli–Palestinian Relations that Nadim Rouhana and I launched in 1994 addressed the issue of dissemination more directly. This project was initiated with the express purpose of producing and disseminating joint concept papers on the final-status issues in the Israeli–Palestinian negotiations and on the future relationship between

the two societies and the two polities that will emerge from the negotiations. The participants were politically influential members of their respective communities, some of whom have held official positions in the past and/or may hold such positions in the future. The working group followed the general principles and ground rules that have governed our previous problem-solving workshops. The principles of confidentiality and non-attribution prevailed, as in other workshops, until the group decided that it was ready to make a particular product public. However, the anticipation that there would ultimately be published papers focused the discussion more tightly and reduced the non-committal character of the interaction. It is a price worth paying if it yields products that reflect the joint thinking of influential, mainstream representatives of the two communities and that can be disseminated under their names to decision-makers and the wider public on both sides.

The continuing workshop and the joint working group represent important new steps in the development of interactive problem-solving. The entire field, for which Ronald Fisher (1993, 1997) and others use the term 'interactive conflict resolution', is still at an early stage of development. A relatively small number of scholar-practitioners around the world are engaged in this kind of work and the experience they have accumulated is still quite limited. However, the field is maturing. The number of centers devoted to this work is increasing. A new generation is emerging. My students, among others, are actively engaged in research and practice in the field and are taking increasing responsibility for organizing their own projects. By establishing their personal identities as scholar-practitioners in the field, they are giving the field itself an identity of its own. Both the older and the younger generations are establishing networks, whose members engage in collaborative work and are beginning to think systematically about the further development and institutionalization of problem-solving approaches to the resolution of international conflicts (see Fisher, 1993, 1997). Among the issues that need to be addressed and that are, indeed, receiving increasing attention are: the evaluation of this form of practice, the training of new scholar-practitioners, the requirements and pitfalls of professionalization, the formulation of principles and standards of ethical practice, and the development of institutional mechanisms that would strengthen the contribution of interactive problem-solving to the resolution of intractable conflicts.

Notes

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