The Effective Adviser's Handbook

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Interpeace
Advisory Team

A resource for professionals working in complex contexts

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First Edition

Suggested citation:
Ernstorfer, A., Refaeil, N. & Ubels, J. (2022), “The Effective Adviser’s Handbook:
A resource for professionals working in complex contexts”, Interpeace Advisory Team.

To support our ongoing learning and evaluate the various uses of this publication, Interpeace welcomes your feedback. Interpeace’s Advisory Team can also be contacted to lead workshops based on this publication’s material. Please e-mail any comments, feedback or collaboration requests to effectiveadvising@interpeace.org.

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Acknowledgments

Since 2013, the Interpeace course on Effective Advising in Complex Contexts has evolved considerably with help from many people. Their contributions have made the course's content and design richer and deeper. It reflects the power of collective work, human exchange and pooled resources.

First and foremost, we would like to thank all the course participants. You embraced the learning journey and willingly shared your experiences with the team and each other. Thank you for all your constructive feedback, which laid the foundation for this manual.

We also express our gratitude to past course facilitators, trainers and resource persons, whose expertise and talent shaped the course, we especially thank: Bernardo Arévalo de León, Louise Le Gat, Koenraad Van Brabant, Abiosseh Davis, Alwin van der Boogaard, and Jean-Paul Chami.

We especially thank Maryjo Cartier, the course coordinator, who co-edited this Handbook and worked closely with graphic designer Nvard Yerkanian to communicate its pedagogical aims and the "open heart and mind" spirit of the course. We also thank Robert Archer as the copy editor of this publication.

We are grateful to Interpeace management and staff who helped nurture the course over many years, and we would especially like to acknowledge Martina Zapf and Laura Frühwald for their past and ongoing support.

Last but not least, this work would not have been possible without the endorsement of the Expert Pool for Civilian Peacebuilding of the Peace and Human Rights Division of the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, and Global Affairs Canada. They have provided far more than financial support. Their long-term commitment and belief in the need to tackle "effective advising" for the wider benefit of the sector enabled the course to continuously adapt and stay relevant.

Anita, Nora and Jan

Foreword by Interpeace

It is Interpeace's hope that this Handbook supports the personal learning journeys of peacebuilding, humanitarian and development professionals, helping them to become more effective in their advisory roles and as they work towards contributing to peace.

The Effective Advising Course first came to existence through a dialogue between Interpeace's Advisory Team and the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA). We noted that sector specific "technical" trainings were abundant (on development, peacebuilding, humanitarian programming, programme design, management, etc.). But very few courses focus on individual behavioural change or on the personal skills that advisers need to manage change processes and their own wellbeing. Yet individual behaviours, personal agency, and everyday individual practices critically influence the effectiveness of initiatives to sustain peace in conflict-affected contexts.

Since its official launch in 2014, the course has continuously evolved, adapted and finetuned its content and methodologies based on careful reflections of the dedicated course team and learnings shared by participants. We are grateful for what has been a long-standing collaborative partnership with the Swiss FDFA that has always centred the main pedagogical goal of the course: that the content remains relevant, practical and meaningful to the needs of participants. More recently in 2020, Global Affairs Canada joined the Swiss FDFA as an ally in nurturing the continued presence and growth of the course.

At Interpeace, we believe that many of the limitations we see in international assistance particularly in conflict-affected settings can be addressed through a peace responsive approach. Peace cannot be built and sustained by "peacebuilders" alone. It requires all those working for peaceful and resilient societies to seriously commit to operationalising conflict sensitivity and contributing to peace outcomes through their sectoral programming. Peace responsive organizations act in ways that enhance collective impact, support inclusive and locally led change, and strengthen society's resilience in the face of conflict and violence.[1]

As such, the course is based on the belief that improvements to individual advisory capacities will strengthen all other levels of our work: generating more effective programmes, organizations, and systems of international assistance. In their individual capacities, advisers play a key role in overcoming organizational, programmatic, or system-wide barriers.

The personal and relational dimensions of advising are many: the relationships between advisers and those they advise, between advisers and the hierarchies of their organizations

1. For more information, see: Interpeace, (2021), "Peace Responsiveness: Delivering on the Promise of Sustaining Peace and the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus", 2021. https://www.interpeace.org/peace-responsiveness. Accessed 14 August 2022.

and professional settings, or between advisers and local partners or donors. The role of advisers is especially extensive and multi-faceted in settings affected by conflict. Here too, advisers are often key influencers: they promote change from within, play insider-outsider roles, make connections, build key relationships, and contribute fresh perspectives.

Often playing the role of “backstage” changemakers, advisors can increase impact, promote sustainability and inspire transformation. Consequently, it is key for advisors to analyse their own perceptions of change and understand the degree to which their perceptions match the perceptions of others. The course seeks to do just this, providing a space for conscious reflection on one’s own personal professional practice.

We recognise that the multi-faceted challenges faced by the development, humanitarian, and peacebuilding sectors can at times feel overwhelming. As individuals, we simply cannot “fix” all these issues. However, we can reflect on the complex dynamics at play and listen to those around us to carefully identify leverage points for change that are manageable and lead to positive outcomes that support the flourishing of more peaceful societies.

We hope this Handbook will be helpful to past, current, and future participants of the course. By transforming individual behaviours and approaches, Interpeace aims to make a wider contribution to the international peacebuilding, development, and humanitarian system.

Scott Weber
President of Interpeace

Introduction:
Why a Handbook and how to use it

Effective advising is about building the individual capacities you need to:

- Adequately position yourself in your professional setting
- Relate to the people you work with
- Choose your ways of working
- Help to bring about change

We hope the Handbook will support the personal learning journeys of course participants and help them in their efforts to become more effective advisers and contribute to sustainable peace.

Key ingredients

This Handbook brings together, in a concise and practice-oriented format, a carefully tailored selection of key concepts and tools that will help you shape your role as an effective adviser in complex settings. It is rooted in the course that Interpeace's Advisory Team (IPAT) has delivered since 2014. It focuses on the needs of national and international advisers who work in development, humanitarian and peacebuilding efforts in complex, conflict-affected and transitional settings.

The Handbook does not give you a standard "recipe" to follow, but rather a mix of "ingredients" that you can combine to reflect your personal situation and preferences. Advisers need to be skilled in many domains; for example, they need technical expertise, interpersonal skills, and process or change management skills. This Handbook does not pretend to cover all the skills you may require. Instead, it provides a number of foundational concepts and frameworks that can help you define your work and choose your approach across varying work settings. The frameworks and concepts are simple and nuanced enough to be used by advisers with different skills and can be adapted as required for local settings and specific assignments.

The content of the Handbook has been applied and tested since 2014 by participants in in-person and online courses and has been finetuned to reflect the needs of advisers around the world. More than two hundred trainees from a variety of professional backgrounds and over seventy countries have contributed to the course's design and materials.

We consider our past participants to be colleagues and fellow advisers in this enterprise. Their continuous collaboration and learning are the foundation of the training.

Types of advisers

Like the course on effective advising, the Handbook is for professionals working in humanitarian action, development, peacebuilding, or stabilisation efforts. Reflecting the profiles of course participants, it focuses on skills and practices that are applicable across the wide range of sectors which they advise on. It addresses the concerns of advisers who work in settings wrestling with conflict and violence, complex social change, and polarisation. The content has proved to be relevant to advisers from all five continents and who work in a variety of contexts and institutions: non-governmental organizations (NGOs), governments, international organizations, the military etc. It is for use by people of all nationalities, and all ages and identities.

The advisers who benefit most from this programme are engaged in medium- to long-term change processes.

The focus of the effective advising course and this Handbook

The overall objective of the effective advising course is to equip national and international experts and advisers with tools and approaches that will help them to work effectively in complex and unpredictable environments. Ultimately, effective advising is about your capacity to position yourself appropriately in your professional setting, relate to the people you work with, choose your ways of working, and help to bring about change.

The course invites you to undertake deep and honest self-reflection. It is as much about dealing with yourself as it is about dealing with the challenging situations and issues you may be working with.

Key contents of the Handbook and how to use it

The Handbook has ten chapters, which present ideas, concepts, approaches, frameworks and tools associated with the course's five core dimensions of advisory work:

- Advisory roles.
- Advising in peacebuilding contexts.
- Personal agency and interpersonal skills.
- Approaches to working for systems change and engaging with complexity.
- Change processes and managing resistance to change.

The ten chapters in this Handbook are rooted in these five areas of learning and have been shaped to help advisers navigate complex advisory assignments, and equip them to optimise their contributions to sustainable peace. In essence, they help advisers to manage themselves, giving them tools and knowledge so that they can more deliberately choose how to shape their advisory roles and ways of working.

For the frameworks or tools, we have drawn on the work of reputed and innovative thinkers in their respective fields, including Céline Bareil, Léon de Caluwé and Hans Vermaak, Acey Choy, Douglas Champion, Davie Kiel and Jean McLendon, Carol Dweck, Daniel Goleman, Stephen Karpman, Jean-Paul Lederach, Donella Meadows, Virginia Satir, Otto Scharmer, A. J. Schuler, Kealy Spring, James W. Tamm and Ronald J. Luyet, Oscar Trimboli, CDA Collaborative Learning Projects, FSG, Human Systems Dynamics Institute and Interpeace. We have tailored them to serve our specific needs and added practical examples of work in conflict-affected contexts.

Ways to use this guide

Combining essential frameworks, discussions on application, questions to work with, and resources for further reading, the Handbook can be used in several ways.

We suggest three:

- As a companion to the effective advising course.
- For self-study and personal reflection over a period of time.
- As a resource which you can consult when you meet real-life advisory challenges, or use as a source of reflection with team members and colleagues.

At the end of each chapter, we have listed additional readings to help guide further learning.

In principle, the Handbook can be used without participating in the course. However, the learning effect will probably be less, because the frameworks might not be self-explanatory without the background knowledge and facilitated conversations provided during the course. If you pick up this Handbook without participating in the course, we recommend that you combine it with wider exchanges with peers and personal reflection.

Note on style

Each chapter follows broadly the same logic and structure. Some chapters focus more clearly on a specific model or framework, while others take a more general perspective. The writing styles also vary. This is due to differences in their content, but also to the different backgrounds, approaches and writing styles of the authors. Nevertheless, our key messages are aligned! We rather hope you find our different voices and perspectives refreshing. After all, every adviser has a unique style.

Chapter 01:
Advising as a multi-faceted professional competence

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What is an adviser?

Do you call yourself an adviser? Do you do a lot of advising in practice but advising is not in your job title? Do you play formal and informal advisory roles?

Advising is a powerful professional role that requires multi-dimensional competencies and a combination of expertise and interpersonal skills.

What advisory functions have in common is that:

- They do not usually have formal authority over the situations or processes they are involved in.
- In many cases, their engagement is temporary.
- They help others work and operate more effectively, often by assisting them to understand how they could do things differently.
- Often, advisers are implicitly or explicitly tasked to “lead from behind”. When they collaborate internationally, advisers frequently assist in-country or local actors to strengthen their capacities, change behaviour or practices, or adopt better ways forward.
- Advisers can also be internal change agents in their own organisations to improve internal practices.
- An adviser is not necessarily a very senior person. Many (informal) advisers are young, or in their mid-career.
- Most professionals who work as advisers have not been trained to advise – but rather have gradually grown into their advisory roles.

This course aims to fill the advising skill gap by providing multiple frameworks to help shape professional advisory work. It considers the roles of in-country advisers, advisers with a global or regional mandate, and national and international advisers. It does not limit the notion of “adviser” to one technical or sectoral domain or job function.

Advising is about You

An effective adviser must be able to build relationships. At any level, you can only do this meaningfully and sustainably if you understand yourself and are aware of how you interact with others. In that sense, effective advising is very personal. It is about you: how you behave, how you are, what you radiate (knowingly or unknowingly), and how you influence others.

> **“Gradually I discovered this is more about me than about the other. Or first about me and only then about the other.”**
>
> *Course participant*

It is based on the honesty and wisdom you gain by looking at yourself that you can start to work with others to support change processes. The personal dimension also extends to questions of “intrapreneurship” and personal agency. Advising is therefore about what you can do in a specific context to creatively manage or work around organizational barriers.

Effective advising implies embracing complexity, ambiguity, and constant change

Assignments in humanitarian action, development and peacebuilding usually require advisers to work with complex human systems. Whether they work with a local community, in a specific sector, at a national level, or across borders, advisers must deal with multiple actors who are likely to have divergent interests, different understandings of the situation, and disagreements about the way forward.

Effective advisers are often required to operate at several levels, including at local, country, regional, or international level. They may need to integrate the social, economic, environmental, and political dimensions of the issues they work on.

An effective adviser therefore needs to be able to read and navigate through complex environments, and to make appropriately constructive and realistic contributions. In the chapters that follow, we discuss essential frameworks, practices, personal mindsets and attitudes that are helpful in such demanding professional settings.

Facilitating change: don’t resist the resistance!

Advising is about change, facilitating progress, possibly even transformation. It is about changing individual behaviour (your own and that of others), organizational performance and/or multi-actor dynamics. Advisers must be able to see and address change from different angles.

Advising is therefore about understanding resistance to change and opening space for fresh possibilities. When you encounter resistance, it is a signal that you have touched a real issue, and that change might be beginning. It may also draw your attention to something that you have not understood well enough, or have not yet adequately addressed. The frameworks and concepts in this Handbook can assist you to understand resistance, change how you deal with it, and enable you to become more agile and resourceful. You may even come to see resistance as a “friend”, an opportunity that you welcome!

Advising complements in-country leadership and ownership

Interpeace emphasised local ownership and leadership in peacebuilding long before the aid sector started discussing localisation and related aid systems change more widely. Localisation calls on us to re-think the relationships between "insiders" and "outsiders", between international staff, national and local staff, and partners at various levels. The essential point is that international actors need to "steer" less from outside, and shift power and decision-making to those directly involved at country level. That is also what advising is about: supporting, facilitating and empowering others, rather than "doing it yourself".

This function requires a significantly different skillset than roles that focus on delivering specific outputs. Even if you are assigned some deliverables, **the heart of advising lies in facilitating, convening, coaching, accompanying, supporting, and clarifying**, rather than "doing". These skills are what this Handbook focuses on. They are essential skills for anyone working in complex settings, including managers, technical experts, and thematic specialists, who advise even though their job titles may not say so.

Advising can help connect development, humanitarian and peace efforts

It has been obvious for some time that narrow sector-defined approaches do not deliver what is required to resolve and transform conflicts and provide meaningful contributions in transitional settings and protracted crises. The UN's resolutions on sustaining peace in 2016 and 2020[2] and the OECD-DAC recommendation on the Humanitarian - Development - Peacebuilding (HDP) nexus[3] are among the most recent policy declarations to demand more coherent and fully integrated approaches. They ask all actors to maximise their contributions to peace, whatever their technical mandate. Many advisers now operate at the intersection of various programmatic and policy agendas and can play a role in linking these.

2. UN General Assembly Resolution 70/262 (A/RES/70/262), 12 May 2016; UN General Assembly Resolution 75/201 (A/RES/757201), 28 December 2020; UN Security Council Resolution 2282 (S/RES/2282), 27 April 2016; UN Security Council Resolution 2558 (S/RES/2558), 21 December 2020.
3. OECD DAC, "Recommendation on the Humanitarian-Development¬-Peace Nexus", OECD/LEGAL/5019.

The art of being a responsive adviser

In line with Interpeace’s peace responsiveness agenda, the course on effective advising seeks to equip individuals to be “responsive” to the settings in which they advise, and to the change processes, programmes and collaborators that they influence. The relational and analytical frameworks provided in this Handbook will help you “read” the dynamics and needs present in your work setting and adjust your own roles, interventions and relational behaviours.

Are you ready to dive in?

Chapter 02:
Clarifying advisory roles

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Balancing expertise and relationships

Many professionals work as advisers, even if "adviser" is not clearly printed on their business cards. However, it is not a simple matter to advise or shape an advisory relationship. What works in one situation may not necessarily work in another. The way you advise may differ considerably from the way somebody else does. There are important variations in task, context, personal style, and what advisees need in a particular moment.

Positive relational dynamics make it possible to transfer expertise. Technical knowledge does not come to life without adequate interactions and relationships.

It is essential to recognise that there are different "advisory roles". An adviser is often (implicitly) equated to an expert, someone who brings specific knowledge or experience. But advising is not just about expertise, advising is about relationships. To an extent, carefully managed relational interactions are at the core of effective advising. Positive relational dynamics make it possible to transfer expertise. Technical knowledge does not come to life without adequate interactions and relationships.

Advisory roles can be understood and distinguished in various ways. In this Handbook, we have adapted and modernised the "9-Role Grid" originally conceived by Douglas Champion, Davie Kiel and Jean McLendon.[4] This model translates well to the reality of international collaboration in development, humanitarian or peacebuilding contexts, where advisers need to:

- Balance content expertise and skill in building relationships.
- Work fluidly and flexibly with a mix of advisory roles, in a range of situations, and with multiple actors.
- Adapt and change roles in response to shifts in context or situation.

An awareness of roles helps adviser and advisee

When you accept an advisory assignment, you need to decide what role(s) you will play vis à vis the advisee (organization, person, client, combination of actors, etc.). Your choice will determine what you take responsibility for and what remains the responsibility of your advisee.

Advising can be done in very different ways. Luckily there is a logic to deliberately choose how you advise.

4. See resource list for the full reference of their article "Choosing a Consulting Role".

Your choice will also determine how you assess the success of the assignment. Setting clear roles is important because failure to do it is likely to lead to poor results. More specifically, consciously defining your advisory role:

- Reduces the risk of confusion and clarifies expectations, about expected results and what will count as success.
- Enables you to discuss and agree responsibilities and divide the tasks between the advisee and the adviser.
- Permits you to choose appropriate interactions and methods.
- Allows you to combine, shift and adjust roles in a transparent manner.
- Helps you to gradually build an (informal) mandate for more demanding or sensitive roles.
- Helps you to discuss the quality of your work, and avoid taking roles you are less equipped for.

The ability to distinguish between different advisory roles is a basic technique that permits you to put your advisory assignments on a sound foundation. Describing your role clearly will help you improve the quality of your work, and take pleasure in it, because you will put yourself in a position to make the best use of your skillset.

The 9-Role Grid

The 9-Role Grid has two main axes (see Figure 1). The horizontal axis shows an increasing degree of adviser responsibility for delivering concrete results. The vertical axis represents an increasing degree of adviser responsibility for client growth.

Figure 1. The 9-Role Grid. Graphic by Interpeace adapted from Champion, Kiel and McLendon, 1990.

In the bottom-right corner, the **hands-on adviser** undertakes to deliver a specific result. This might be a technical design, a review of financial accounts, or a piece of analysis. A hands-on adviser does not consider whether the advisee's capacity is being increased. What counts is the delivery of a "technical" result.

In the top-left corner, the **coach** is the antithesis of the hands-on adviser. The coach delivers no concrete result but is entirely focused on growing the capacity, insight and performance of the advisee. It is characteristic of a coach that she or he is not normally directly involved in the working situation. Coaching interactions focus on real-life work dynamics but are "off-the-job"; they help advisees to understand and reflect how they see and experience their situation and how they act and interact.[5]

In the bottom-left corner is the **reflective observer**. This might be described as "the mother of advisory roles" because it captures the adviser's most essential skills. Whether you focus on technical results or the advisee's capacity, you must be able to clearly and objectively understand the issue your advisee is facing. In the reflective observer role, you do not act or steer, but function as a mirror, simply observing aloud what you see and hear. Such interventions can be very powerful, especially when a simple but meaningful observation opens up a new perspective or reveals a pattern in which the advisee is "trapped".

If asked to describe the adviser/advisee relationship, people often favour the roles in the bottom-right of the table. But other roles are truly important and valuable, even though the advisee may not be aware of them. In the bottom-centre of the table is the **technical expert**, who provides relevant technical expertise but takes no responsibility for delivering the result and is not trying to build the advisee's capacity.

In the far right of the middle row is the **modeller**, who takes full responsibility for achieving results but is aware that the advisee should also learn from the process, though this is a secondary concern.

At the top-centre is the **mentor**. Like the coach, the mentor is keen to improve the capacity of advisees but deals more with the content of the work. Characteristically, mentors tend to have significant experience in the domain in which the advisee requires advice. They bring that knowledge, experience and wisdom but also emphasise capacity growth and encourage their advisees to decide what is the best way forward.

In the centre-left is the **process facilitator**. In this role, the adviser works to improve the (collective) capacity of the advisee(s) to address an issue, make decisions or advance a task. It is characteristic of this role that the adviser is not focused on specific technical results. Indeed, facilitators are often required to be "neutral" about these and in some situations it may be considered an advantage if they are not expert in the domain that is being addressed.

5. Note that the 9-Role Grid gives "coach" a different meaning than in sports. Sports coaches bring content expertise to their work. (The grid would describe them as mentors.) They usually also take responsibility for overall team performance.

In the middle of the grid, is the **teacher or trainer role**. This combines the transfer of expertise with an ambition to help the advisee grow; but the advisee is free to choose whether or not to use, apply or integrate the teacher's advice. Trainers/teachers usually work with groups and as a result do not tailor their work to every specific situation of each advisee (as a coach would). When they do focus on individual needs, they combine the basic trainer role with elements of coaching and mentoring and/or elements of technical and hands-on advising.

Finally, in the top-right corner is the **partner**. In a way, this role starts to fall outside the advisory domain because adviser and advisee work together in a more equal way. In the context of international collaboration, the term is often (mis)used: "partner" affirms the idea of joint cooperation and collaboration, but partner relationships may be highly unequal in terms of power, resources, and the resulting consequences of working together. For example, a large external institution may fund and determine the project activities of its local partners and may cease to feel responsibility when the project ends, while the local partner must not only accommodate the institutional needs of its larger sponsor but live with the project's long-term effects. Nevertheless, in many complex projects, external advisers often work together with their advisee to address an issue that requires them to combine their expertise and mix roles. In a partner situation, advisers must be able to work horizontally, enabling the adviser and the advisee to adopt and switch roles as appropriate.

The 9-Role Grid does not capture all roles and one can define and use other roles. The grid does however provide a practical framework to discuss different kinds of responsibilities that an advisor can take on and various possible divisions of roles and responsibilities between the advisee and the advisor.

The partner role in international cooperation

To run a water project in a conflict-affected setting, an international donor may appoint an international project manager, supported by a deputy project manager from the country. When they take operational decisions, the two may operate as partners; each may also bring different expertise to the situation. The international project manager may have general project management experience at a level and breadth that may not be available in the country. The deputy project manager may have an understanding of local dynamics, relations and risks that the international manager cannot acquire.

When they take key operational decisions, they need to balance their contributions and may function as true partners (if working relations are well developed). Hierarchically, however, the international project manager is likely to be directly accountable to the donor and may feel obliged to reduce the formal and visible responsibilities of the deputy for issues that are locally sensitive. On the other hand, the informal influence and power of the deputy (especially with local actors) may exceed that of the project manager.

It is important to recognise that many roles need to be played in such projects, because they are relevant to results and outcomes. They include hands-on advising, technical advising, and training of technical staff. Local NGOs and government staff may need to play training roles too. In addition, temporary project staff (from within or outside the country) may come in as mentors, trainers or modelers to help develop specific skills required.

Choosing, combining and switching roles

Combining and switching roles is common and possible. Maintaining clarity on role variations will avoid confusion and disappointment and help you deliver quality.

It is important to appreciate that role selection is not about preferences in personal relationship styles. Role selection matters because it affects **results and effectiveness**. The role you assume determines the objectives you aim to deliver as an adviser. This is true for all forms of assignment. The different objectives of each role are outlined in Figure 2. This figure is deliberately indicative. Specific objectives must always take account of the task that needs to be done, the underlying challenges or needs that must be addressed, and the specific context in which one operates.

Roles: what do they provide/deliver?

Coach "You do it. I'll be your sounding board." **Questions, angles, confirmation.**	**Mentor** "You did well. You can add this next time." **Specific feedback, experience, suggestions.**	**Partner** "We'll do it together and learn from each other." **Collaboration, joint solutions**
Process facilitator "You do it. I'll take care of the process." **Process support.**	**Trainer/teacher** "Here are principles you can use for problems of this type." **Internalisation of principles and practices.**	**Modeller** "I'll do it. You watch and learn from me." **Exemplary solution(s), to be copied.**
Reflective observer "You do it. I'll watch and tell you what I see and hear." **Observations.**	**Technical expert** "I'll answer your questions as you go along." **Answers and (specific) directions.**	**Hands-on adviser** "I'll do it for you. I'll tell you what to do." **Solution(s), detailed instructions.**

Figure 2. What different advisory roles provide and deliver. Graphic by Interpeace.

Differences in results delivered by the roles are directly connected to the **division of responsibilities between the adviser and the advisee**. For example, a technical adviser will seek to suggest what may be the best solution for the specific problem. By contrast, trainers transfer knowledge to their advisees, so that they can independently choose their best solution. Whereas a hands-on adviser will apply general knowledge to a specific setting, identify a practical solution, and may play a role implementing it.

Advisers often need to **combine or switch roles**, especially when they work on complex or long-term assignments. When you do so, it is important to carefully choose and switch between different roles depending on the situation, the context, and the people you are working with.

Combining roles

A **technical adviser** might be commissioned to help design a technical or social intervention. According to the circumstances, the adviser may choose to take a hands-on or a modeller role. The adviser may also be called on to (informally) **coach** a manager responsible for the process if the manager has sufficient trust, and requests or permits it. The same adviser may also **train** the design team to carry out tasks associated with the design process, or similar work in the future. The adviser may also **mentor** selected individuals.

Roles may evolve spontaneously as the job proceeds. Advisers should make sure (especially in unclear situations) that they always make changes in their role clear to themselves and to others, as these directly affect the responsibilities assumed by the adviser and advisee(s). Failure to clarify can create confusion, disappointment or tension and can put at risk the **success of the assignment**, in terms of project results (in this case, the realisation of the design) or the capacity improvements of the advisee (the design team, its members, and its manager).

When working with an organization or team for a longer period, you may find that your role evolves over time from the bottom-right side of the grid (implying a high degree of engagement and influence on results) towards its upper-left (implying a focus on growing advisees" capacities). As you phase out of a project, your overall aim should be to shift away from the more ambitious roles (on the top and right sides of the diagram) towards roles that are less active (at the bottom and left sides of the diagram).

It is important to note that different roles require different skills and types of interaction. When you decide to play a particular role, recognise that **it is connected to specific skills and experience** (methodologies, professional repertoires, practices). In this sense, each role you choose will engage specific personal capacities and abilities. It takes time, usually years, to acquire the professional skills associated with each role. Do not therefore be too ambitious or too confident when you play a new role. At the same time, it is perfectly possible to switch swiftly between roles that you have mastered: to train advisees in the morning, mentor an advisee in the afternoon, and provide technical advice to a manager at the end of the day. Advisees often want an adviser to play a range of roles under one assignment but it is important to go about each one consciously, and to communicate effectively to avoid confusion or disappointment.

Roles can be mixed in technical expertise assignments but also in **process-oriented assignments**. For example, if you are asked to facilitate a workshop or multi-stakeholder platform, you can ask yourself whether you can be most useful if you lead the facilitation (and thus be "hands-on") or should ask the partner organization or other actors to lead facilitation while you adopt a coach or mentor role and perhaps transfer facilitation expertise through training, "technical" advice or modelling.

> **"The 9-Role Grid helps clarify roles and responsibilities and to overcome and discuss implicit assumptions of what is expected of me and what I can deliver."**
>
> *Course participant*

Your role choices should be informed by who you are, your personal inclinations, and your skills and capacities. You can use the 9-Role Grid to **better understand yourself as a professional**. What do I feel I am capable of doing? What am I really good at? What roles have I not yet mastered? In what roles do I feel less comfortable and less skilled? You can use the grid to protect yourself: to identify your resources and strengths, to identify and clarify your limitations, and to indicate when you should invite another person to cover a required role. In this way, the 9-Role Grid can lead you to explore less familiar roles and take forward your **professional development**. Do this with appropriate modesty. Look for support if you decide to learn a new role. This is relevant if you are one of a team of advisers. In such situations, you can deliberately try to collaborate with team members who have complementary skillsets.

Common challenges and how to overcome them

For all advisers, it is always challenging to reach a **clear, shared understanding of roles** with an advisee. Many problems and disappointments in advisory processes are caused by confusion, lack of clarity, or a mismatch of roles. To avoid these, it is important to talk to your advisee about role expectations and expected results, preferably at the start of your collaboration. In some cases, it may take time to achieve clarity. Initially, advisees commonly assume they want expertise; very often they have not considered what role they want the adviser to play, and the role they (implicitly) have in mind may not be appropriate for the challenge or situation they face. For example, if an organization asks you to give a training, but there is an underlying dispute over the training topic, a coaching, mentoring or process facilitation role might be more relevant and more useful than the training role requested. Working roles out in relation to real needs is one of the key initial steps in any collaboration. But it often requires time and trust-building.

Working roles out in relation to real needs is one of the key initial steps in any collaboration.

People and organizations may not have the same understanding of roles, especially **across (sub)cultures** (even within the same country or region) and they may expect roles to be performed differently or may not accept certain roles at all. Usually, it will take time and effort to develop a shared language and understanding of what is to be done and what role(s) are most appropriate. For instance, you may need to earn credibility and relational trust by playing a content-oriented role, before you are allowed to engage in facilitation, coaching or mentoring.

The official **formulation of an assignment**, for example in a Terms of Reference (ToR) or job description, is often unclear or ambiguous about roles and often presents unrealistic ambitions. For example, assigning a very short time frame to deliver ambitious outputs and expand capacities of a team/group/advisee. It is important to agree on a realistic ambition with the advisee, and if necessary, revise or renegotiate your formal job description or the assignment's ToR. You may need to (re)negotiate with the sending organization or donor as well.

Frequently, the various actors involved in an assignment have different expectations. In particular, the advisee's plan may not match that of the organization/donor/mission you work for. In international cooperation, **"multi-level" client settings** are frequent. You should do all you can to align the expectations of the advisee with the expectations of the donor/your employer. Advisers often need to change the expectations of donors and the organizations that employ them in order to create conditions in which they can advise and work productively with the reality of the advisee.

Addressing questions of mandate

The challenges discussed above highlight how important it is to clarify the adviser's role **early in the assignment**. Even when job descriptions and terms of reference have been well drafted, you need to discuss role choices explicitly during the start-up or inception phase. Do so as you explore and analyse the local situation and context and identify the real demand and underlying needs of the advisee.

Do not assume that it will be straightforward to clarify your mandate and role. There may be (hidden) **tensions or differences of opinion**, for example between local actors (including the advisee) or between the sending/donor organization and the advisee. Differences of understanding or perspective may only become obvious as the work progresses. Even where a situation is tense or politicised, the 9-Role Grid can be used to decipher different perspectives and (gradually) build a more shared understanding of needs and what support is required. The 9-Role Grid can empower clients and advisees to make their wishes clear.

Your mandate to play certain roles doesn't come only through a formal agreement and ToR (though these help). It has to be "earned" by you and "permitted" by your advisee.

Finally, it is essential to realise that you will not resolve concerns about your mandate or role by focusing on formal terms of reference and job descriptions. In the end, what matters is the **informal mandate and permission** that your advisee gives you (or does not). Your informal mandate is essentially the sum of **personal legitimacy, credibility and trust** that you acquire as an adviser. It is influenced by many factors: organizational dynamics, but also the advisee's broader relationship and sympathy with the sending/donor organization, and the advisee's previous experience of advisers. At a more personal level, your previous experience is relevant, as is your affinity with the local situation and the advisee's situation. Age, gender, and cultural background are factors too. The important underlying notion to retain is that your mandate to play certain roles must be clarified and agreed, but also permitted and won. See Chapter 6 on personal and interpersonal agency, which discusses how elements of identity (such as gender) may play a role.

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Key questions for the adviser

- Do you clearly understand which roles will be most relevant and appropriate for this specific assignment? How should you balance the aim to achieve specific results with the aim to increase the advisee's capacity and autonomy of action? Do you need to review this balance as you go along?
- Do you and the advisee agree on what roles you will adopt? Do you and the advisee agree on the implications of that choice? Do you need to consider whether the donor organization/your employer understands your role choices? Have you and the advisee agreed on the division of responsibilities and the results expected? If not, what can you do to improve joint understanding and expectations?
- In this assignment, should you (gradually) change roles or role combinations to be more effective? How can you do this in collaboration with your advisee and donor organization/your employer?
- How do the role(s) that you play in this assignment (or in general) match your qualities and experience? Should you develop or avoid certain roles, to improve the quality of results and/or your wellbeing?
- What roles and related skills and expertise would you like to develop in the next few years? How can you do this realistically? What initiatives can you take, and what forms of support can you organize, to help you do this?

Resources

Champion D. P., Kiel D. H., et McLendon J. A., (1990), "Choosing a consulting role." Training & Development Journal, Vol. 44, No. 2, Feb. 1990

Further reading

Gerspacher N. (2016), "Strategic Advising in Foreign Assistance: A Practical Guide", West Hartford, Kumarian, 2016.

Chapter 3:
Relational patterns: dysfunctional and constructive behaviours

CONTENTS

In Chapter 2 we concluded that advising is essentially about combining expertise and knowledge with relational and interactional skills. Advisers therefore need to be aware of the relational dynamics around them and seek to alter these when they obstruct progress. The “Drama triangle” and the “Growth triangle” are tools that can help you do so. You do not need to be a trained psychologist to understand and work with these tools. At the same time, they are nuanced enough to untangle quite challenging and varied situations.[6]

Patterns of interaction in advisory relationships

Growing relational awareness needs ongoing learning. Don’t expect to become instantaneously relationally effective! Relational hurdles and resistance are normal; they are inherent to advisory work.

The dynamic between adviser and advisee may change; it can become more or less productive over time. This is not abnormal. When you work in complex contexts, numerous pressures can bear down on advisory relationships, and experiencing relational hurdles and resistance is entirely foreseeable. For example, you may notice that you are starting to judge your advisee harshly or taking more responsibility than you should because your advisee is less active. As an advisor you must be aware that it is (also) your behaviour that may be making interactions less productive, and you are just as responsible in creating interactions that are positive.

Relational patterns and interactive attitudes can be analysed in many ways. The models we use here are called the “Drama triangle”, originally developed by Stephen Karpman, and the related “Growth triangle”, developed by Acey Choy.[7] Both are widely applicable and can help you understand:

- Unproductive patterns that may have become a habit.
- Key attitudes and behaviours that can help you interact positively.

Both models are used by coaches and other professionals who work with people and relationships.

Dysfunctional patterns: the Drama triangle

Informed by transactional analysis (a psychological approach), Karpman distinguished **three typical reactive behaviours** in human interactions. He grouped them in a triangle to indicate how they relate or respond to each other.

6. Note that Chapter 6 separately discusses personal agency and interpersonal relationships.
7. Choy originally called this the “Winner’s Triangle”. Since, other titles have been applied by professionals using this framework to avoid some of the connotations linked to the term “winner”.

The Drama Triangle

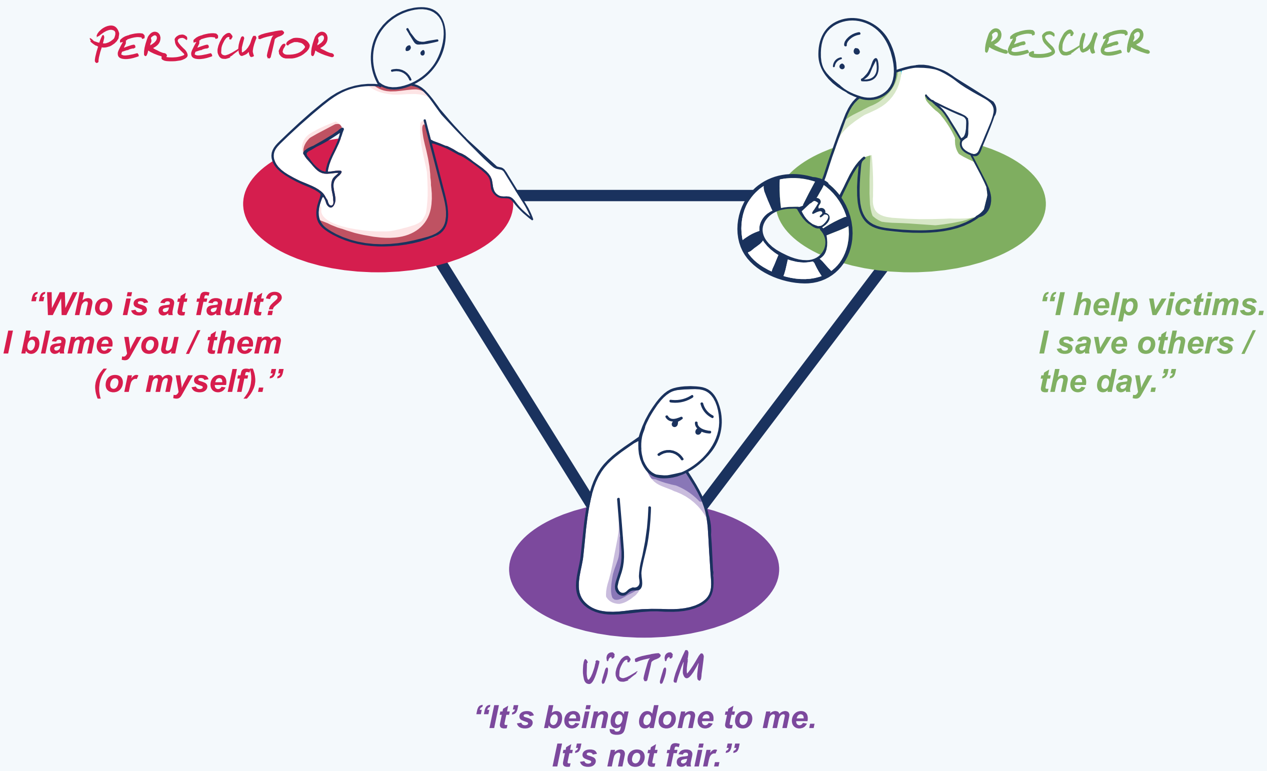

Figure 3. The three "Drama" positions. Graphic by Interpeace.

PERSECUTOR	RESCUER	VICTIM
"Who is at fault? I blame you / them (or myself)."	"I help victims. I save others / the day."	"It's being done to me. It's not fair."
IN ESSENCE: ACT OUT OF SELF-INTEREST	**IN ESSENCE:** ACTS OUT OF CONCERN FOR THE OTHER	**IN ESSENCE:** DOES NOT ACT IN THE FACE OF (POSSIBLE) SUFFERING
CHARACTERISTICS • Turns others into victims. • Punishes, accuses or blames others. • Takes revenge. • Corrects or disciplines others.	**CHARACTERISTICS** • Solves somebody else's problems (without being asked to do so). • Does more than needed. • Still does things (even if help is unwanted). • Is protective.	**CHARACTERISTICS** • Acts as if incapable of resolving matters. • Invites pity, mercy. • Avoids responsibility. • If things fail, blames somebody else.
UNDERLYING LOGIC Victims do not matter / others are not OK. I can't be OK unless you are punished.	**UNDERLYING LOGIC** I am OK and others are not capable of solving their problems.	**UNDERLYING LOGIC** I am powerless and not OK (and you/they are also not OK).

Figure 4. Key behavioural repertoires associated with the Drama positions. Graphic by Interpeace.

As an adviser, you can be drawn to each of these positions. In the international development, humanitarian and peacebuilding professions one is easily drawn to the **Rescuer** position, wanting to improve the world and assist people living in difficult circumstances.[8] The pitfalls of an excessive "helping attitude" are numerous. In Rescuer mode, you may have preconceived ideas of a problem and how it needs to be resolved, and consequently may have a (hidden) dominant and superior attitude. Advisers with this behaviour may disempower rather than empower their advisees by assuming responsibility and doing too much, rather than assisting advisees to solve issues themselves. In complex situations such advisors often overestimate their ability to help.

The **Victim** position can also be found in development, humanitarian and peacebuilding settings – including in advisory roles. In the Victim position you feel subject to forces larger than you; and you express frustration that you are unable to influence large political and institutional processes. Advisers with this attitude may say they feel powerless, are not able to make their own choices, and tend to blame others for their situation.

In the **Persecutor** position one tends to blame, criticise and label others, as well as external factors. Often, one has clear opinions about what is good or bad and blames others (rather than yourself) for what goes wrong. Identity-based judgments can come into play here (whether about a type of person, a culture or organization, etc.). In essence, in a Persecutor position you have an attitude that is defensive, but with dominant, even aggressive traits. Advisers with this attitude are judgmental about actors they work with, the overall situation, and their institutions, and may behave as if they know better than others.

Constructive behaviours: the Growth triangle

As professionals used the Drama triangle to understand and change behaviours, they realised that each of the "drama positions" has its own inherent qualities. The "drama" develops when these come too much to the fore in an unbalanced way impeding the flourishing of constructive relationships. The Growth triangle[9], originally conceived by Choy, identified these essential qualities and readjusts the behavioural pendulum to create open and efficient interactions.

Essentially, Rescuers have a positive ambition to take care of people or situations (whereas Victims and Persecutors are both less interested in doing this). Victims recognise their vulnerability (whereas Rescuers and Persecutors are less self-aware). Persecutors dare to say what they see and be assertive (whereas Rescuers and Victims are not as forthright). Understanding these positive ambitions at the heart of each position, enables you to move from "drama" towards "growth". Note that the three angles of the Growth triangle do not represent fixed positions, but essential qualities that individuals can activate and work with.

8. Some decolonising aid and anti-racism advocates speak of the white saviour syndrome, which in essence is a rescuer position.
9. Originally Choy called this the "Winners" triangle. We have not used this term because it suggests that there can also be losers, whereas Choy intended his triangle to focus on attitudes and behaviours that are positive for everyone.

The Growth Triangle

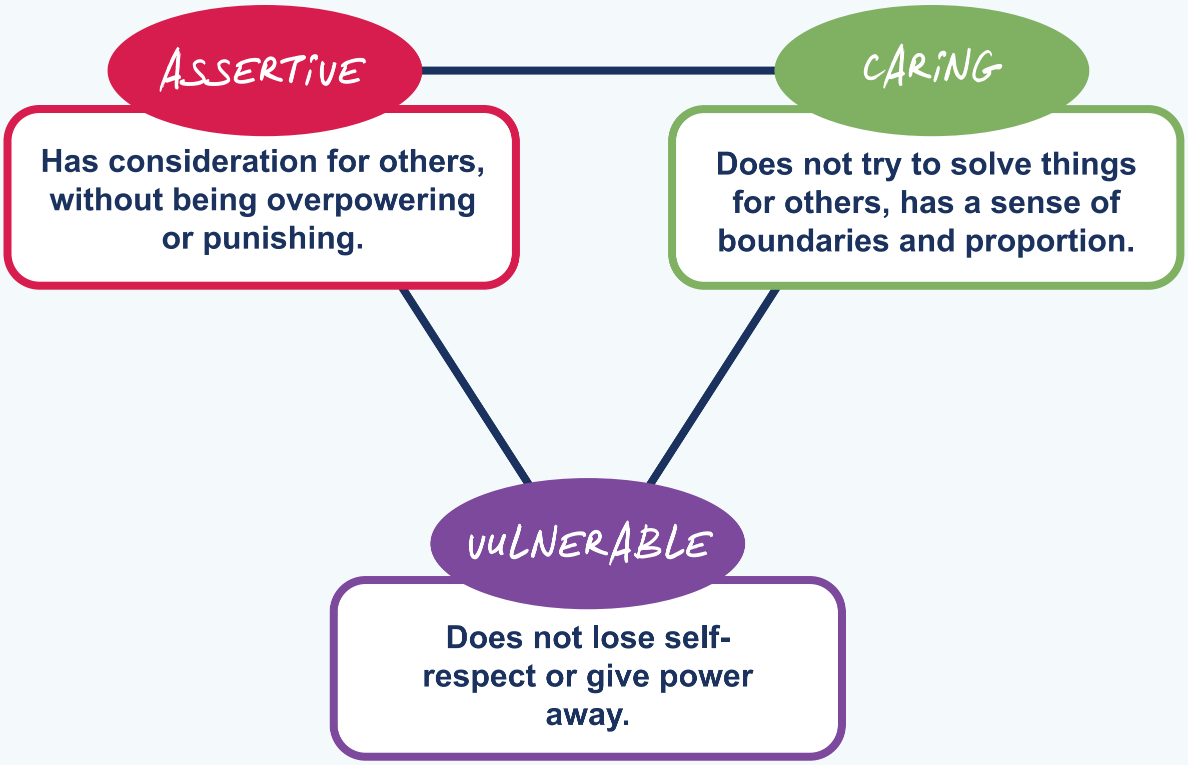

Figure 5. The three "Growth" positions. Graphic by Interpeace.

ASSERTIVE Has consideration for others, without being overpowering or punishing.	CARING Does not try to solve things for others, has a sense of boundaries and proportion.	VULNERABLE Does not lose self-respect or give power away.
IN ESSENCE: AWARE OF YOUR OWN AND OTHERS" INTERESTS	**IN ESSENCE:** CONCERN FOR OTHERS AND YOURSELF	**IN ESSENCE:** OPEN ABOUT YOUR ISSUES WITHOUT RELINQUISHING POWER
CHARACTERISTICS • Ask for what you need (rather than enforce). • Dare to say no to what you don't want. • Give and receive feedback. • Are ready to change position / matters.	**CHARACTERISTICS** • Think for yourself not for others. • Do not do work for others (unless you are asked and it is appropriate) • Do not do more than is really needed. • Do not do what you do not want to do or find inappropriate.	**CHARACTERISTICS** • Dare to be vulnerable and open. • Are not steered by your fears and old experiences. • Take your own feelings seriously and act upon them. • Address issues from a position of (co-) responsibility.
KEY SKILLS Self-assertion (say what you think/feel/need), awareness of others.	**KEY SKILLS** Listening skills, self-awareness, sense of boundaries.	**KEY SKILLS** Problem-solving, self-respect.

Figure 6. Key behavioural repertoires associated with the Growth positions. Graphic by Interpeace.

To shift from the status of Rescuer to **caring**, first listen better to others. Listening gives others power to speak of their needs and views (see Chapter 5 on active listening). By listening, you encourage your advisees to analyse their situations, express themselves, and take decisions. It is equally important to listen to yourself! Rescuers often overstretch themselves trying to help and end up overburdening themselves and disempowering others. From a position of self-care, you can restore your personal boundaries, and be more aware of the overall context you are in and its effects on your personal situation and resourcefulness (for more on resourcefulness, see Chapter 6 on personal agency).

The power of **vulnerability** is sometimes less easily grasped. For some, showing vulnerability is a weakness. However, it can be powerful if you are open about your uncertainties but do not act like a Victim. In fact, faced by a challenge, vulnerability is often an important point of departure to really deal with it. By acknowledging and admitting to being vulnerable, you can openly discuss, address, and overcome it. The key is daring to be vulnerable without relinquishing your sense of agency or your responsibility to (help) solve challenges. Even in deeply hurtful or traumatic situations, where you may objectively become a victim (of violence, for example), a turning point occurs when victims, while recognising that they are vulnerable, become capable again. The essential attitudes and skills here are related to self-respect and problem-solving. We do not imply that this is easy. If you are in a tough situation, it may be difficult to share an issue that causes you to feel vulnerable, and at the same time retain your problem-solving capacity. You may first have to find “safe spaces” in which you can explore the issue with a trusted colleague or a person outside the work setting. This may gradually give you the courage to occupy more challenging spaces. It is remarkable how a victim’s shift in attitude can often influence others, disrupt the status quo, and shift relational dynamics.

When Persecutors become more “horizontal” (more collaborative, less hierarchical) and more respectful of others, they remain able to say what they see and what is needed. This is the essential quality of being **assertive**. This can help create a space in which others can express themselves more freely. An adviser who is not a Persecutor but is assertive, speaks out but is not overpowering, does not disqualify others, is not dominant or aggressive. As advisers, we can develop Persecutor’s traits: implicitly or not, we can be judgmental, critical, feel superior (towards certain counterparts, organisational patterns etc.). Such attitudes and behaviour can influence an adviser’s presence and readiness to manoeuvre. They limit your freedom of interaction (even if unknowingly). The key here is not to relinquish your assertiveness, but use it in a more open, interactive and less threatening way. Be more aware of others, open to feedback, ready to adjust your own position and perspective when you interact with others (see Chapter 6 on personal agency).

If you feel entrenched in one Drama position, look beyond the behavioural repertoire suggested by the corresponding mirroring of the Growth triangle. Perspectives from other angles can be very helpful as well. For example, if you tend to rescue you may find it helpful to recognise your vulnerabilities. If you tend to develop Victim attitudes, it may be difficult but essential to become more assertive. If you get drawn to the Persecutor, it may be helpful and rewarding to show care for others. Taking account of the situation and your abilities, you can use the three angles of the Growth triangle to help you dislodge entrenched relational patterns that prevent you from advising as well as you could, and adopt more productive behaviours.

Applications and challenges

It is good professional practice to regularly reflect on the relational dynamics between you and the actors you work with.

Research on the performance of professionals has shown that, of the three types of intelligence (IQ, expertise and emotional intelligence), IQ is the poorest predictor of success (only 4-25%). According to Daniel Goleman (quoted in Burgess (2005), see Resources at the end of this chapter), expertise is a baseline competence and not a good measure for distinguishing outstanding from average performers. Rather, it is emotional intelligence that really helps you navigate complex situations and deal with different people and behaviours. As highlighted by Robin Burgess, **emotional intelligence is what marks out top performers** and their organisations (see Chapter 6 for more on personal agency and interpersonal skills). Using the Drama and Growth triangles is about developing emotional intelligence.

It is **good professional practice to regularly reflect on the relational dynamics** between you and the actors you work with. You do not necessarily have to do this explicitly with the people concerned; that might not always be feasible or desired. However, it is sensible and important to regularly exchange and reflect with a trusted colleague or professional friend outside work on your relational dynamics and how these are evolving. This helps you to nurture healthy relationships, maintain your wellbeing, and ensure consistent and professional results. If you are able to develop strong relational awareness, you may find you can discuss many of the Drama and Growth triangle dynamics (at least implicitly) with advisees. To begin with, you can ask simple questions, such as “Where are we getting stuck?” or “Where do you think we might be limiting each other?” or “What could really help to make us work together more productively?” Such questions create space to discuss “Drama” and “Growth” dimensions in a non-threatening way (see Chapter 8 on asking questions and standing in inquiry).

Attending to the quality of relationships is **personal**. It is not simply what you need to do as an adviser or as a professional. It is about who you are, and how you act and interact as a human being. We bring the “whole person” to our job. Our personal tendencies can often be found in one corner or another of the triangles. We develop patterns in our childhoods and in our family systems and take them with us into adulthood and our professional lives. This is why working in challenging situations affects us and can affect our wellbeing. In this sense, the use of the Drama and Growth triangles can help you to be a better adviser, by helping you to maintain sound relationships and preserve your mental and emotional health in circumstances that are challenging.

Advisers who work in **complex situations where the dynamics shift often and unpredictably** rely a great deal on their emotional intelligence. Depending on your situation, you may find yourself at different moments and times in all three drama positions (Persecutor, Rescuer and Victim). It is important to understand that one angle of the Drama or Growth triangles is not better or worse than others. They represent patterns of response, not moral categories. All Drama positions are understandable responses to difficult situations; all Growth positions have their specific strengths as well as limitations.

"Relationships are the wheels of change."

Course participant

As an adviser in the field of international cooperation, you may often work for an organization or donor that sets the objectives of your assignment. This might activate certain relational dynamics. If the sending organization or donor makes you accountable to meet specific targets or deliverables on their terms, this may constrain your possibilities and responsibility as an adviser to respond to the advisee's needs. It might steer your behaviour not just towards a rescuing position but possibly towards a persecution position to secure project results; this is generally a recipe for failure (see the discussion on mandate and permission at the end of Chapter 2).

Main takeaways

- The Drama and Growth triangles help us analyse patterns of response in relationships. They are not moral categories.
- 'Drama" positions help you to analyse your contributions to suboptimal relational dynamics and understand where and how you "get stuck". They also help you see the contributions of others.
- The "Growth" triangle helps you to shift your behaviour and to sustain or create more open relationships. Your self-awareness is likely to encourage others to act in a positive way.
- Growing relational awareness needs ongoing learning. Don't expect to become instantaneously relationally effective! Relational hurdles and resistance are normal; they are inherent to advisory work.
- As an adviser, it is good professional practice to regularly reflect on your relational dynamics with those you work with. You can do this with a trusted colleague, a professional friend, or member of your team. As much as possible, have a similar discussion with your advisee too.

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Key questions for the adviser

- What types of (difficult) relationship dynamics are most evident in your work environment? What contribution do you make? Can you detect the roots of your behaviour in your professional career or life history?
- If you are faced by a challenging situation, what "drama" position do you gravitate to? Can you identify the variables (or events or triggers) of a particular pattern?
- How do you fall into relational "traps'? What happens in practice? What feelings and thoughts do you experience? What (implicit) decisions and steps lead you to adopt that position?
- What alternative behaviours could you adopt (generally or in a specific situation)? Which behavioural qualities of the Growth triangle might help you move away from negative patterns?
- How can you start to steer yourself more deliberately towards alternative behaviours? What feelings and thoughts will help you? How can you take alternative inner decisions that will enable you to be open to others and to care for yourself?
- Can you personally help to transform some of the difficult relations you are presently in, into more constructive "growth" relations? Can you use your answers to previous questions to do this?

Resources

Burgess, R. C., (2005), "A Model for Enhancing Individual and Organisational Learning on "Emotional Intelligence': The Drama and Winner's Triangles", Social Work Education, Vol. 24, No. 1, February 2005, pp. 97-112.

Choy, A., (1990), "The Winner's Triangle", Transactional Analysis Journal, Vol.20, No. 1, 1990, pp. 40-46.

Goleman, D., (1998), "Working with Emotional Intelligence", Bloomsbury Publishing, London, 1998.

Karpman, S., (1968), "Fairy Tales and Script Drama Analysis", T.A. Bulletin, Vol 7., No. 26, 1968, pp. 39-43.

For a variation on the Winner's or Growth Triangle, see: Emerald, D. & Zajonc, D., (2019), "The 3 TED* (*The Empowerment Dynamic) Roles: Their Core Beliefs and Aspirations", Centre for The Empowerment Dynamic, 2019. www.theempowermentdynamic.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/CCC-Article-2019.pdf. Accessed 14 August 2022.

Chapter 04:
Improving organizational approaches and practices for sustaining peace

CONTENTS

What can advisers do to help organizations become more "fit for purpose" in conflict-affected settings?

The United Nations" (UN) Sustaining Peace Agenda and the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus ask all actors, regardless of their technical and sectoral mandates, to work together more coherently to maximise their contributions to peace. At the same time, evidence from practice has shown that international responses to conflicts and protracted crises regularly fall short of their potential to strengthen resilience and peace in societies, and often cause unintended harm. In this Handbook, we want to unpack two vital questions. Which organizational and operational practices improve prospects for sustainable peace? And how can advisers help organizations avoid negative practices and adopt practices that promote peace?

Challenges in the way we operate

Countless evaluations, research and learning experiences have shown that the international system has not been able to deliver on its promises to people living in conflict-affected contexts.[10] Though the "Do No Harm" principle is widely accepted, conflict sensitivity is insufficiently implemented in practice and many international organizations repeat the same mistakes. They tend to focus too much on the short-term risks of exacerbating conflict, do not consider structural factors adequately, and focus too little on a society's innate capacity to foster and sustain peace and resilience. Many reasons explain the persistence of these failures. Conflict insensitivity is often perceived to be due to lack of knowledge, capacity or programming skill. However, it is often better explained in terms of political will, organizational cultures and practices, individual mindsets, and system wide barriers.

10. A recently published synthesis review and analysis of aid delivered in settings affected by conflict revealed that aid is more likely to increase than reduce violence (Zürcher 2017, 2020). This and other evidence (Autessere 2014, 2021; Anderson, Brown and Jean 2012) indicates that aid organizations are failing to apply conflict-sensitive principles and are not listening enough to local stakeholders and that the behaviour of individuals is critical in this regard next to operations and programs.

Calls to reform, localise and decolonise the aid system

Within the international aid system, pressure to localise and decolonise aid and apply principles of diversity and racial equality have energised advocacy in favour of systemic change in the sector more broadly. Many organizations are extending the idea of localisation (often narrowly understood as “participation” or “local management”) towards substantive devolution of power and decision-making to the local level. Some organizations are reviewing their internal governance and power structures, recognising that these often mirror the shortcomings of North-South power imbalances.

It is difficult to implement these changes in practice but there has been progress. A growing number of civil society initiatives are pushing collectively to shift power, reform funding, and localise decision-making. To illustrate, PeaceDirect (www.peacedirect.org) promotes local leadership for peace; Conducive Space for Peace (www.conducivespace.org) advances systems change in the peacebuilding and aid sectors; the Radical Flexibility Fund (www.radicalflexibility.org) works to improve foreign assistance and the private foundation model by shifting resources more effectively and directly to individuals, networks and civil society organizations; the RINGO project (www.rightscolab.org/ringo) is reimagining the role of global civil society; and the Start Network (www.startnetwork.org) (a global network of humanitarian agencies) seeks to transform humanitarian response through innovation, fast funding, early action, and local leadership.

Connecting individual, programmatic, organizational and systems levels

To address the above mentioned barriers systemically, advisers need to recognise from the start that they operate, not just in a specific assignment or programme, but in a wider setting. Their work can be understood in four interrelated dimensions: at the level of individuals, programmes, organizations, and the wider system. (See Figure 7[11]).

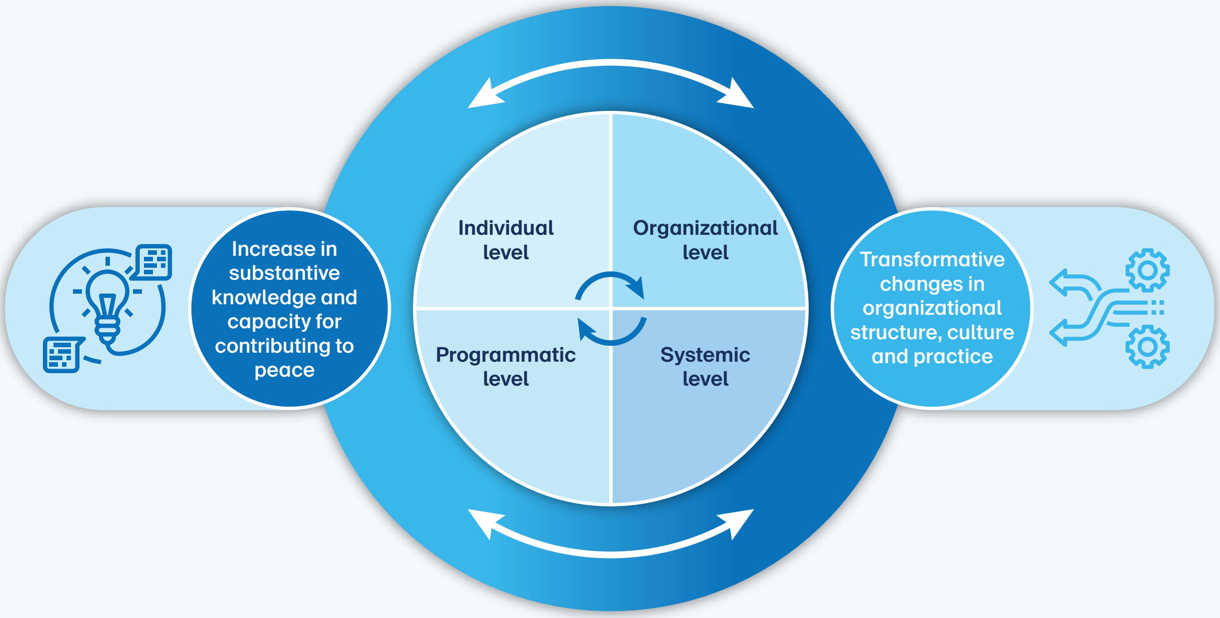

Figure 7. A peace responsive approach requires change at every level: individual, programmatic, organizational, and systems. Graphic by Interpeace.

If ineffective organizational approaches and systems are not reformed, if the politics of the wider international and aid systems are dysfunctional, and if individuals are not empowered to act in peace responsive ways, long-term peace is unlikely to be achieved. In general, however, international actors that work in conflict-affected areas generally try to improve their performance by focusing (albeit not exclusively) on programmes and their implementation. An abundance of guidance explains how to do technical programming well. Nevertheless, organizational and systemic patterns of conduct continue to impede the effectiveness of international responses in conflict-affected areas and efforts to restore and sustain peace.

11. Diagram developed and published by Interpeace: "Peace Responsiveness: Delivering on the promise of Sustaining Peace and the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus", Interpeace, 2021. https://www.interpeace.org/peace-responsiveness. Accessed August 14 2022.

Impediments to effective action in support of peace[12]

- **Project management is prioritised rather than process orientation.** A focus on preset outputs and outcomes diverts attention from processes that strengthen relationships and trust.

- **Competition crowds out collaboration**. Procurement rules and competition for resources impede partnerships.

- **Accountability is upward rather than downward.** Accountability systems that prioritise fiduciary accounting marginalise accountability to the people served.

- **Context does not lead decision-making.** Programme designs and implementation are insufficiently grounded in local realities, and ill-adapted to their context. Institutional politics trump a mission-driven and context-led focus.

- **International and local are not perceived as part of the same system.** Local actors are not included or do not meaningfully participate. Participation is often limited to "consultation" processes that are not led or driven locally. External expertise trumps local knowledge. Internationals perceive that they are in a separate system.

- **'Short-termism" dominates.** Funding arrangements and project cycles prevent actors from adopting a long-term perspective.

- **A "fix-the-problem" mindset.** International actors want to solve specific problems, rather than assist local actors to make the best use of their capacities and make a contribution in the long-term.

12. Source: Interpeace, "Peace Responsiveness: Delivering on the promise of Sustaining Peace and the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus", Interpeace, 2021 https://www.interpeace.org/peace-responsiveness.

Sustaining peace is everyone's responsibility

The effective advising course is aligned with Interpeace's peace responsiveness agenda.[13] The twin resolutions on Sustaining Peace, which the UN issued in 2016 and 2020, ask development, humanitarian and stabilisation actors to maximise their contributions to peace by adopting a whole-of-system approach. Furthermore, the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus[14] asks for greater coherence amongst development, humanitarian and peacebuilding actors. In terms of their approach, objectives and methodology, most organizations can be placed on a spectrum of engagement in conflict-affected contexts, illustrated in Figure 8.

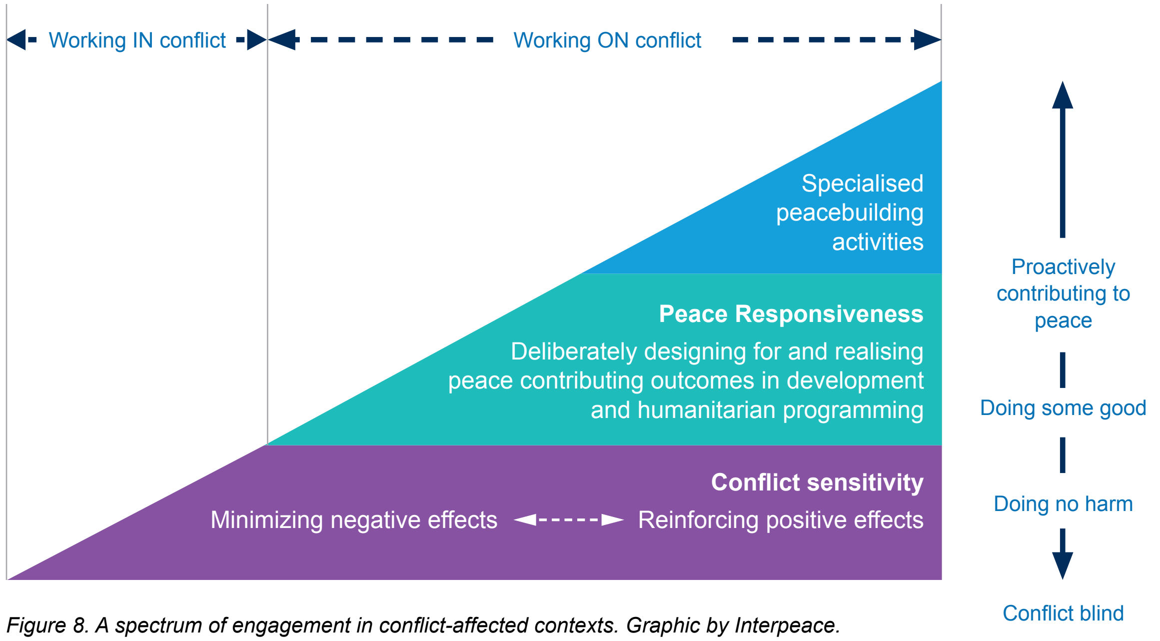

Figure 8. A spectrum of engagement in conflict-affected contexts. Graphic by Interpeace.

A peace responsive approach recognises that sustainable peace cannot be achieved by peacebuilders alone: development, humanitarian, peacebuilding, stabilisation, and human rights actors must work collectively to build it. For development and humanitarian organizations, this implies that they will apply principles of conflict sensitivity and peacebuilding when they implement their sectoral and technical programmes and will collaborate with fellow peace actors whenever appropriate.[15] Peace responsive organizations support inclusive, locally led change and strengthen societal resilience to conflict and violence.

13. This chapter is informed by Interpeace's work on peace responsiveness. For a more detailed introduction to peace responsiveness, see Interpeace's dedicated webpage on this approach: https://www.interpeace.org/peace-responsiveness.
14. OECD, DAC recommendation on the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus, OECD/LEGAL/5019.
15. Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC, 2020), "Exploring Peace within the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus".

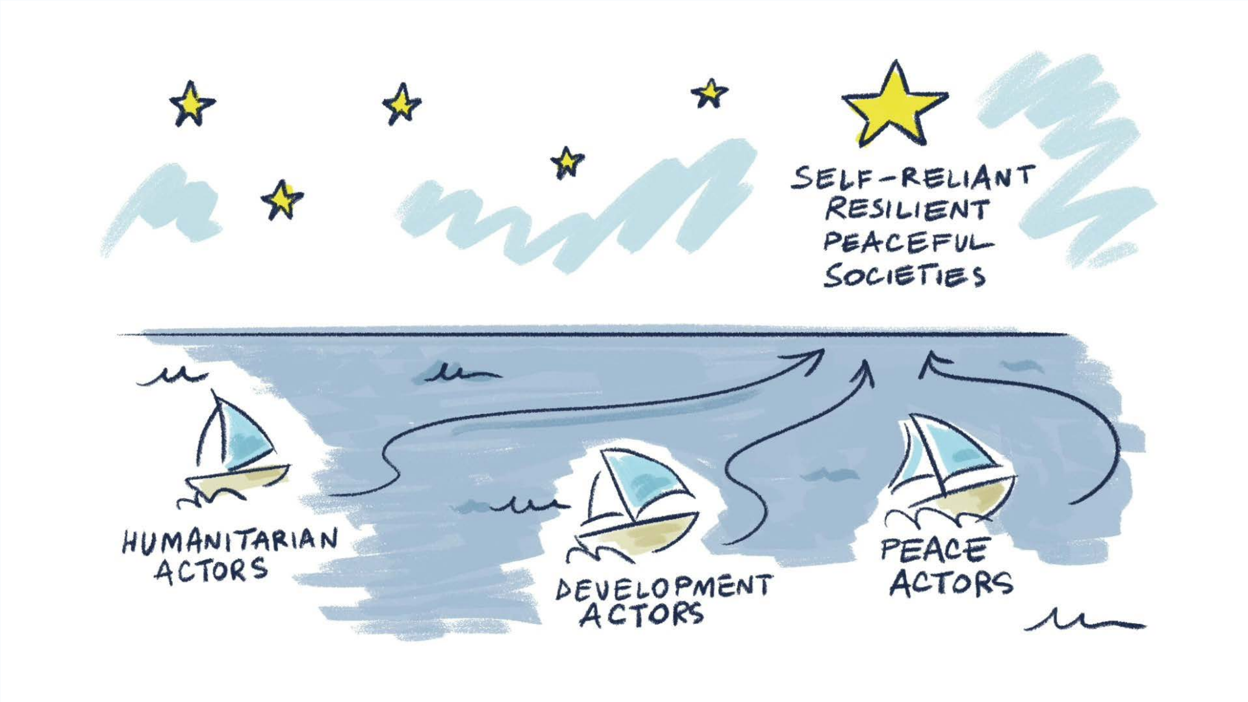

Figure 9. Visualising the P in the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus.[16] Graphic by Interpeace, FAO & IOM.

To be effective towards a joint vision for peace responsiveness, change must be brought about at the four levels highlighted above: **individual, organizational, programmatic**, and **systemic**. (See Figure 7.)

Individual level. Individual attitudes, beliefs and mental models are at the core of decision-making and shape organizational policies and practices. They are usually the forces that most strongly hold structures and social patterns in place. The peace responsiveness approach recognises the roles that individuals play in influencing and shaping the overall architecture of organizations, the delivery of programmes, and the wider system. Interpeace builds the capacity of individuals to become change agents in the organizations and contexts in which they work – the effective advising course specifically supports this objective.

Organizational level. A peace responsive approach critically examines organizational practice. Organizational culture, policies and procedures should facilitate learning, encourage readiness to adapt, promote the flow of information between local environments and headquarters, and establish effective feedback mechanisms between organizations and communities. Interpeace promotes changes in organizational and operational practice that intentionally contribute to peace outcomes.

16. Interpeace, FAO & IOM, "Connecting the dots: Visualizing the P in the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus", 2020, https://vimeo.com/476353689. Accessed 14 August 2022.

Programmatic level. A peace responsive approach enables all actors who operate in conflict-affected or fragile settings to contribute to more peaceful and resilient societies. It enhances their ability to be conflict-sensitive and to deliberately design and apply their technical programmes to contribute to peace. In terms of methods, it values collective impact, supports inclusive, gender-responsive and locally led change, and seeks to strengthen societal resilience to conflict and violence. Peace responsive programming can increase impact in two interrelated dimensions: it can increase contributions to peace, and it can increase the effectiveness of technical programming. Interpeace works with partners to strengthen a peace responsive approach in their programmes, and participates in joint programming with development, humanitarian and stabilisation actors at country level.

Systems level. Many of the obstacles to peace responsiveness are due to structural barriers and disincentives in the wider aid system. Siloed funding streams, weak systems, disincentives to collaboration, conflicting incentive structures and timelines, and different operating modalities all tend to undermine effective cooperation and collective impact. All actors in the wider aid system, including donors, have a role to play in making it more fit for purpose.

An example of a "peace responsive" approach: FAO addresses resource-based conflicts in Abyei

Between 2015 and 2017, an FAO initiative[17] in the contested Abyei Administrative Area between Sudan and South Sudan improved livelihoods, reduced the risk of natural resource-based conflicts, and enhanced community resilience:

Abyei is a grazing hub. Historically the Dinka Ngok and the Misseriya communities shared its grazing land and water, but competition over natural resources led to frequent violent conflicts between the communities.

FAO provided community-based animal health veterinary services to both communities. It realised that, working with local authorities and the UN peacekeeping mission (UNISFA), it could address wider resource use issues, including movement and access to pastures.

As a direct result of this work, the communities signed a community-level peace agreement on natural resource use in June 2016. The agreement made it possible to establish a shared market in the heart of the demilitarised zone. This facilitated trade, increased livelihoods, reduced food prices, and strengthened interactions between local communities.

17. Source: Thematic paper presented to the UN Peacebuilding Support Office: FAO and Interpeace, "Pathways to Sustaining Peace at the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations", 2020, United Nations, www.un.org/peacebuilding/sites/www.un.org.peacebuilding/files/fao_-_peacebuilding_and_sustaining_peace_thematic_paper_1.pdf. Accessed 14 August 2022.

Becoming “fit for purpose’

What then can we do to become “fit for purpose”, able to contribute usefully to sustaining peace? The orientations below are essential elements of any organization’s efforts to contribute to peace, regardless of its technical mandate or objectives:

1. **An institutional commitment to sustaining peace.** Organizations have a clear vision for sustaining peace and are committed to that vision. Commitment is at the highest level (senior management, executive board), covers partnerships and programmes, and is supported by robust mechanisms and processes that translate commitments into practice at all levels of an organization.

2. **Capacity for peace responsive programming.** Programming adopts a peace responsive approach, with clear direction and guidance, including training in relevant technical skills (for example, peace and conflict analysis). Organizations encourage staff to think adaptively and stand ready to work in conflict-affected contexts in accordance with conflict sensitivity principles. Peace responsive design, monitoring, evaluation and learning systems set out clear and evidence-based change pathways for peace; the latter are tracked by monitoring and evaluation systems that are flexible, identify intended and unintended impacts, and take account of complexity. A culture of learning emphasises reflection and learning over accountability.

3. **An enabling organizational environment.** Action to sustain peace extends to every part of the organization, from policy and programming to finance, human resources, and procurement. Sufficient human and financial resources are allocated. Human resource policies incorporate peace responsive skills and competencies in job descriptions, performance assessments, etc. Peace responsive roles are not wholly outsourced to consultants or housed exclusively in specialised technical units. Relevant “soft skills” (for example, facilitation skills and flexible mindsets) are recognised and rewarded beyond technical programming skills

4. **Meaningful partnerships at multiple levels.** Organizations work closely with partners at all levels and promote programme synergies in all areas. They analyse, advocate and programme in association with local, national and international organizations that have similar activities and purposes. They promote and facilitate local leadership and equitable partnerships between international and local organizations. Too often, large multi-mandate agencies bring a “service provider” attitude to partnerships [“*I hire you to produce X*”]. Sustaining peace requires egalitarian partnerships that create synergies and go beyond formal cooperation or “coordination”.

Where advisers can contribute

Even if programmatic and operational factors are often a more obvious focus of advisory work, a key insight for advisers is to acknowledge how organizational, individual, and systemic dimensions significantly impact our work. The best designed and managed programme will be in vain if other levels are dysfunctional. Organizational practice(s) and culture, poor programming, lack of adaptability, individual mindsets (of colleagues and partners), and wider system dysfunctions can each undermine effective work at other levels. You need a holistic understanding and approach.

This has implications for advisers" formal and informal mandates (see Chapter 2 on advisory roles). How do you respond if you are asked to advise on a technical or operational matter, but realise that what is needed is a broader organizational response?

Below are five approaches and mindsets that may help advisers to navigate the broader context in which they are working and plot their position within their organization and context.

1. **Look beyond the technical task: take note of organizational dynamics and individual mindsets**
   This is the first step! Whether you are advising an organization you work for, or are an external adviser, it is easy to get bogged down in programme technicalities. Advisers often spend a considerable time "fixing" such issues only to realise much later that the real blockage or resistance to change is rooted in broader organizational dynamics or the mindsets of advisees and staff. Being aware of wider organizational dynamics and blockages is the first step towards a strategy of change. Effective advisers need this skill.

2. **Facilitate local leadership**
   Much evidence suggests that organizations fail to achieve their goals in conflict-affected contexts, at least partly, because they do not give local colleagues, teams and partners sufficient opportunity to lead or shape their strategies and programmes. Local ownership has been a fundamental principle of good and effective peacebuilding and development practice for a long time. But, despite the progress noted earlier, implementation is too often superficial and tokenistic. Advisers can significantly help to shift partnership models, funding arrangements, power structures, organizational practices and incentive structures. Raising such topics can nevertheless be sensitive. Advisers are sometimes in a good position to take action because they are removed from day-to-day implementation, or because their outsider status gives them a degree of freedom.

3. **Adopt an intrapreneurial mindset**
   Most large or multi-mandate organizations have explicit hierarchies. In such organizations, it tends to be assumed that leadership is exercised largely if not

exclusively from the top. This can be disempowering; staff at junior or mid-levels or colleagues considered as "local" staff often feel overwhelmed by "the system". Moreover, if they try to exercise leadership and initiative in their sphere of influence, or disagree with established practices or hierarchical dogmas, they are likely to be marginalised by conventional organizational incentive structures. In reality, staff at all levels can usually exercise more influence on day-to-day operations than they realise, because they are close to the point of implementation and can see how decisions play out. However, it often requires creativity and guts to tackle real and perceived organizational barriers and generate change. Advisers (both staff and external) are often in a position to encourage a more "intrapreneurial" approach that invites every member of staff to participate in influencing and taking decisions. They can raise questions, promote or model a range of leadership styles (leading "from behind", "from the centre" or "from the bottom"), and encourage colleagues to engage. Nurturing informal relationships, networks and alliances, and encouraging peer leadership, can stimulate significant changes in organizational practice. And taking leadership at any level might involve taking a personal risk.

4. **Rethink accountability: dare to question "how things are done'**
   Every organization is governed by a specific combination of formal and informal rules, procedures, mindsets and customs. Often, organizations are founded and governed according to well-established ideas and practices that are not necessarily formal in nature but which over time have come to be regarded as "set in stone". For example, in many organizations, "accountability" is understood to be a top-down, linear and uni-directional process, even though more horizontal and collaborative ways of understanding (and practicing) accountability may lead to better results. But in a more horizontal and collaborative understanding of accountability a more balanced perspective is possible: Organizations can be accountable to donors, the communities they serve, and to the national government. Programme managers can simultaneously be accountable as budget holders as well as to those their programmes benefit, etc. Questioning established practices can be uncomfortable but is sometimes necessary. It requires willingness to embrace the unknown, creativity to find a new path, and realism to see in what circumstances permission to disrupt might be obtained.

5. **Embrace complexity; make links with the wider system**
   Organizational practices often fall short because institutions parcel up issues and responsibilities to suit the needs of a bureaucratic structure. As a result, individuals and teams tend to see themselves as separate from larger (possibly dysfunctional) elements of the system to which they in fact belong. A peace responsive approach can help to operate more effectively in conflict-affected contexts partly because it integrates what bureaucracies tend to keep discrete. It works across sectors and silos, hierarchies and systems, to achieve collective impact and synergies. This is easier to do if organizations embrace complexity and non-linear thinking, and staff (including advisers) reflect critically on their role in the wider system. We will talk more about systems, complexity and non-linear thinking in Chapter 7.

> **The application of systems thinking to the advisory function and to the peacebuilding field specifically sheds a whole new light on bringing about connections and understanding systems. It is the perfect illustration of bringing together the organizational and structural with the interpersonal.”**
>
> *Course participant*

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Key questions for the adviser

Making use of the diagram introduced earlier (Figure 7) to navigate specific settings, you could ask some of the following questions:

- What are the reasons for not making progress towards what you are trying to achieve? Is the obstacle a programmatic issue, an organizational dynamic, found in individual mindsets and behaviours, or a problem of the international aid system? How do different levels influence one another? What space do you have to manoeuvre?
- What do people you advise think impedes (technical/programmatic) changes you are trying to make together? What is really the issue (internal incentive structures, organizational culture, personal fears, etc.)?
- How does the perspective of those you advise differ from your own analysis of the situation?
- What factors promote peace, and what factors impede peace at each of the four levels? (A force field analysis might help you answer this question systematically.)
- What are the most promising opportunities to change individual mindsets, programming approaches, or the organizational culture?
- Where can you influence conditions? What opportunities or options or relationships might enable you to influence conditions? Where do you have, and where do you lack, space to manoeuvre?
- How do the answers to the above questions condition your assignment and the things you can expect to achieve? What might you need to defer, renegotiate, or adapt?

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Chapter 05:
Active listening as a starting point

CONTENTS

Why active listening?

Active listening is a foundational skill for advisers because it enables them to understand what is at play in a situation.

Effective advisers need to be skilled at understanding and managing multi-actor and organizational dynamics, to encourage effective engagement to sustain peace and remove impediments to effective engagement. They need to understand individual mindsets as well as the organizational dynamics of groups of actors. Although it is often taken for granted, active listening is a foundational skill for advisers because it enables them to understand what is at play in a situation. The ability to listen - to colleagues, to advisees, to explicit and implicit messages of organizations, and to signals from the wider system – is a skillset. It is also important to listen to yourself! How can you become sensitive to what is communicated and going on around you and within you? That is the subject of this chapter.

Good listeners hear more and can be better advisers

Active listening generates trust when it is done well because the speaker feels heard; and it becomes possible to understand a situation more deeply.

At an individual level, active listening enables you to remain balanced and resourceful, aware, and mindful of how you interact and communicate, in the midst of complexity, pressure, and stress.

At an organizational level, there are increasing demands to be mindful of and critically question the interactions between international and local stakeholders, and "outsider-insider" dynamics. There is a desire to move away from traditional forms of collaboration (articulated through the country presences of international organizations) to forms of support that are lighter, more facilitative and devolve more control to local partners. For advisers, these shifts change the emphasis of their work. Do you need to change perspective and redesign how you give support? How can you respect the autonomy and power of those you advise, but still offer useful support? Becoming aware of how you listen can help you make the necessary adjustments. Think about what you listen for, how you use the information you are given, how you seek feedback, and how you stay in inquiry and remain attentive (see Chapter 8 on standing in inquiry).

Figure 10. Is your mind full or are you mindful? Graphic by Interpeace, adapted from Henck van Bilsen.

Active listening is far more than not interrupting. It describes a state of listening that is fully engaged and actively present. It is a nuanced skill that advisers need to exercise constantly. It requires you to focus intently on the speaker while suspending your preconceived ideas about what information or message you expect the speaker to deliver. While they speak, you are present, not already formulating a response in your mind. You are listening to what is said and pay attention to emotions and body language (how it is said). You listen for underlying needs, intentions, motives, and willingness to find solutions. You do not label what you hear or jump to rapid conclusions. Through verbal and non-verbal cues, the speaker should notice that you are listening and receptive. Active listening generates trust when it is done well because the speaker feels heard; and it becomes possible to understand a situation more deeply.

Active listening has several distinct functions:

- At a basic level, we listen to **understand** what others are saying and what is going on around us.
- We listen to **connect with others**, to build relationships and rapport, to create space for others to express themselves more precisely, more deeply, more explicitly or more carefully.
- We listen to hear what is being said and **what is not being said**.
- We listen openly, actively, and consciously to encourage **others to open up**, both to speak and to listen in their turn.

Chapter 6 on personal agency and navigating interpersonal dynamics introduces the notion of the "personal iceberg". This prompts us not just to notice visible behaviours and what is being said overtly and directly, but to hear and understand the unspoken thoughts, emotions, needs and values of those around us (as well as ourselves). The personal iceberg model can help you to take active listening to another level: to be aware of the complex hidden as well as visible layers of human communication.

Insights from "Time to Listen"

The Listening Project[18] (run by CDA Collaborative Learning) was a rare large-scale attempt to listen openly and without judgement to people who receive international aid. "Listening teams" recorded the views of people inside and outside the aid system in twenty countries, using an open feedback approach. Their views were published in a book titled "Time to Listen". Among many insights, the book concluded that international staff and organizations do not sufficiently listen to or consider the views of people they are working for/with, and that these failures are systemic products of the aid system.

A few quotes from "Time to Listen" to illustrate this point:

- *"There is a responsibility for foreigners to quiet their voice. Calm down and visit and get to know the people. Don't run in with your own agenda."* A monk on the Thai-Burma border.
- *"The donors never take the time to consult with and listen to beneficiaries. This is the first time I have seen that!"* The female president of an association in Mali.
- *"Our international friends said they would serve, but they didn't, so there is a distance between them and my people. People now realise they are not here to help. No one is listening to us and we want to express our views."* A librarian in Afghanistan.
- *"Thank you for listening to us and allowing us to tell you what we would like to tell those who have power over this great power that is international cooperation."* A woman in Ecuador.
- *"Some NGOs come here, gather information, and don't come back. People are frustrated. Other organizations follow in their steps, and people are no longer willing to engage in conversations."* A woman in Sri Lanka.
- *"If you ask me what my priority needs are and I tell you, but then you bring me other things instead, I will take them, but you did not help me."* A farmer in Mali.

18. Source: Anderson, M. B., Brown, D., and Jean, I., (2012), "Time to Listen: Hearing People on the Receiving End of International Aid", Cambridge, MA: CDA Collaborative Learning Projects, Dec 2012. https://www.cdacollaborative.org/publication/time-to-listen-hearing-people-on-the-receiving-end-of-international-aid. Accessed 17 August 2022.

What do you listen to and how? Four fields of listening by Otto Scharmer

Otto Scharmer's "four fields of listening" framework can help to finetune your active listening skills. The four fields highlight the underlying principles of active listening: your aim is not to pick up signals and information that reflect your own thinking, but to open your mind, heart and will to hear what is being communicated at a deeper level, often less explicitly.

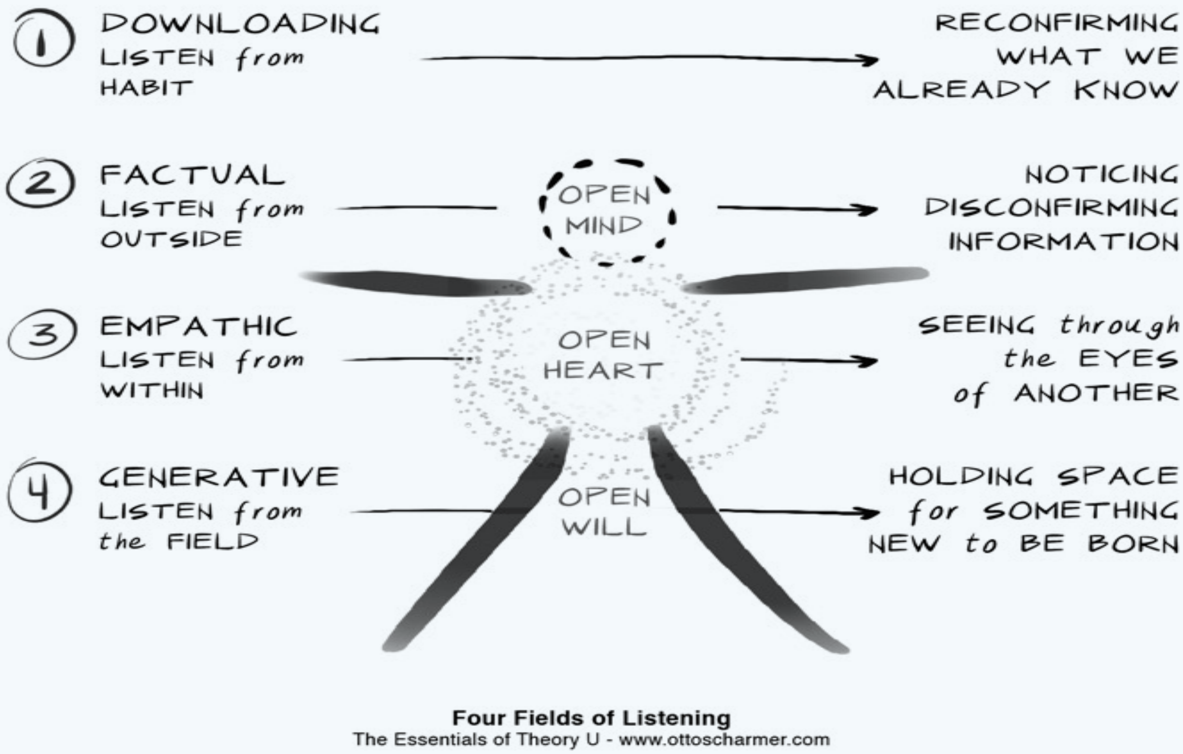

Figure 11. The four fields of listening by Otto Scharmer. This work/graphic is licensed by the Presencing Institute - Otto Scharmer.[19]

1. **Downloading.** This form of listening reconfirms what we already know. Little that is new penetrates our bubble. When you "download", your attention is not focused on what the other person says but on how you understand the situation, and your own inner commentary and confirmation of ideas you already have. In this mode of listening, you may notice yourself planning what you will say next. Otto Scharmer calls this "listening from your own prison": your mind places everything you hear within the boundaries of your own perspective. It does not respond to what is happening outside, mainly reflects past experiences or current plans, and reconfirms what you already know.

19. Graphic published in Otto Scharmer's (2016). Theory U: Leading from the future as it emerges. Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

2. **Factual listening.** In this form of listening, we notice different kinds of information. We examine the data and notice information that does not coincide with our positions. This listening requires opening the mind: we need to suspend our tendency to confirm what we know and exercise our judgment. As you cross the threshold from downloading to factual listening, your attention moves from listening to your inner voice to listening to the person in front of you. You open up to what is being said. To build on the prison analogy, you do not look into your prison cell but step up to the window to look at what is going on outside. This approach is adequate for simple data collection: however, if you are working to change behaviour in a complex environment, you need to listen more deeply.

3. **Empathic listening.** In this form of listening, you are prepared to look at the situation through the eyes of others. It requires opening the heart: you actively employ your empathy, your feelings and your heart, to understand your interlocutor's perspective. When you start to cross the threshold from factual to empathic listening, your location as a listener shifts from you to the person who is talking to you; you do not privilege the intelligence of your head but give space to the broader intelligence of your heart, your intuition and your sensitivity to non-verbal signals. For example, you might think, *"I do not agree but I can understand how she or he sees the situation."* At this level, you connect with the experiences, perspectives and motivations of others, and can begin to understand your interlocutor's thinking below the surface.[20]

4. **Generative listening.** This form of listening is not only sensitive to the interlocutor's perspectives and motivation, but listens for what else may be possible, for what new could be born, and for options and opportunities that might be co-created with others. When you cross the threshold from empathic to generative listening, you become attentive to opportunities. Rather than focusing on your own presumptions, you listen with openness for what is emerging, for ideas that are unfamiliar or that you have not considered. This level of listening requires you to relinquish preconceptions and follow the flow of a conversation, allowing your perspective to change and other perspectives to take form. You also need an open will. In many respects, generative listening is the most difficult level of listening. It requires you to be open to emerging patterns and in that sense to embrace uncertainty. For many, this can be unsettling. But it raises a key question for advisers: if I listen carefully, can I understand things that my advisee is not aware of?

20. Such inferences are evidently subjective and must always be confirmed.

Generative and "progressive" listening in advising

Good advisers are skilled in generative listening. Listening to your current struggles, an adviser would ask pertinent questions and help you reach higher levels of future possibilities in yourself, without pushing their own preset ideas or priorities. What Otto Scharmer calls generative listening, is related to what Oscar Trimboli calls "progressive listening", which allows a dialogue to evolve and advance. Like generative listening, it requires participants to really listen to what emerges from their exchange. It is about how you listen and interact in discussions to create a sense of momentum and excitement. The challenge remains to avoid downloading and projecting your perspectives on the future, but instead to listen attentively to what emerges from the exchange.

An effective adviser works along the listening "spectrum" described above. You should always try to exercise empathic and generative listening, alongside factual listening, in order to increase your openness, flexibility and creativity. At the same time, many advisory situations will require you to set up orderly processes, which may discourage flexibility and open thinking. A balance needs to be reached: the virtues of flexibility and creativity need to be set against the effects of uncertainty and lack of direction. Effective advisers bring both structure and an open mind to processes of change.

Generative listening in the peacebuilding field

In the peacebuilding field, Jean-Paul Lederach has been a pioneer of "generative listening" and ways of working that give birth to new ideas. In his "The Moral Imagination: The Art and Soul of Building Peace" (see reading list) he argues that, to follow unfamiliar paths and create what does not yet exist, we must be able to recognise turning points and possibilities. This requires a vision of social change that empowers individuals and teams to imagine and generate constructive ways forward that have roots in current conflicts but possess the power to generate conditions for peace. Generative listening is the foundation to imagine such ways forward.

Listening is a crucial leadership skill, especially in complex and conflict-affected settings. Leaders at all levels have often failed because they were unable to listen deeply and could not make sense of their complex, uncertain, and ambiguous environments. If you do not become a good listener, you will probably not become an excellent adviser.

Learning how to listen implies transforming how you experience your relationships and the world. To do that, you must be ready to change at a personal level. It is not an easy task.

We describe below some of the challenges that make active listening difficult, and how you might address them.

Six listening pitfalls, and attitudes and skills to approach them

Avoid being “the lost listener’; declutter your mind

In his work on listening, Oscar Trimboli describes “lost listeners”, who are entrapped in their own minds rather than present in the conversation. If you are in that state, you are absorbed by your last thought or your next thought and cannot properly focus on the discussion or interaction around you. Your interlocutor is likely to disconnect from you, because you are not really involved. Being fully present is a pre-condition of listening actively. Start by making yourself aware of your own state of mind. You need to recognise what is going on in you and in your mind, and consciously make yourself available to listen to others.

Active listening requires us to hear with more than our minds

We have all been trained to speak (in one or several languages) but have not usually been taught how to listen. Active listening requires us to listen with more than just our rational mind. We need to feel empathy, exercise emotional intelligence, and use other abilities we possess to relate to others (see Chapter 3 on the Drama and Growth triangles, and Chapter 6 on personal agency and interpersonal dynamics). Tuning in to our emotional resources is often the first challenge because we have been trained to listen to facts, technical information, and what people actually say; we pay less attention to body language and informal signals (see Chapter 6 on personal agency and specifically the iceberg model). In particular, we often lack the skill to pick up what is not expressed in words, such as emotions or needs. Active listening requires us to show up as a full person with all our senses, engage with our heart, mind, and spirit, and be open to listening on all these levels.

A "fixing the problem" mindset can stand in the way of active listening

In Chapter 7 on systems and complexity, we discuss how working in complex environments requires us to move from a "problem-fixing" mindset to a "pattern-seeking" mindset. The "fixing" mindset sometimes stands in the way of active listening: we jump to familiar conclusions and want to resolve problems of the advisee (sometimes from pure professional enthusiasm) without first weighing up and responding to their descriptions of the issue. As an adviser, active listening will help you to steer clear of the temptation of jumping to give advice. The person who presents a problem must lead the search for its solution. You need to trust your advisees and "keep out of it", while supporting them as they try to resolve their challenges. Your aim should be to intervene only if it becomes necessary.

Be comfortable with silences

For many people, moments of silence in a conversation or group meeting are perceived as awkward or even uncomfortable. We tend to fill them as quickly as we can. It is important to resist this temptation, because pauses and silences are often the moments in which we see a new possibility, understand what is really going on, or realise the underlying meaning or intention of a message.

> ***"Their pause is the most critical moment in your listening. When you understand the importance of honouring silence, space and pause in a discussion, you start to explore the world beyond words."***
>
> Oscar Trimboli

We naturally listen more and better to certain people and contexts than others

How we communicate is influenced by how we were brought up, the way our families communicate, the schools we went to, and our early professional and personal experiences. We all bring cultural particularities to our conversations and are often influenced by the organizational cultures of our work environments. Our natural tendency is to listen better to those whose backgrounds are similar, who speak our (linguistic or technical) language, or who are intellectually, emotionally, or ideologically compatible. This is a trap the effective adviser needs to be aware of. You should consciously work to counter such biases. In conflict-affected contexts, not doing so may mean that you do not listen properly or fairly to some advisees or stakeholders, and privilege the views of others. Ultimately, this leads to "group think". As an adviser, it is essential to resist this temptation by striving to listen to everyone without bias or preconceptions.

> **"I want to highlight how surprising and beautiful it is to be invited to listen with your heart and your stomach. How valuable it is looking at yourself as a tool of change. First looking inside, understanding and trusting yourself and then openly listening to others and holding the space for something new to be born."**
>
> Course participant

Main takeaways: what does active listening require?

I. **Be there, pay attention**
- Be present in heart, mind, and spirit.
- Show that you are listening in a context-appropriate way (eye contact, body language).
- Observe the body language of those you interact with. Be aware of your own energy, preferences, mindset, fears and ambitions, because you bring these to the conversation.
- Be aware of your biases and how you may (unintentionally) discriminate against certain people.
- Listen for underlying messages about feelings, needs, values. Listen at many levels.

II. **Empathy and withholding judgment**
- Do not pursue a personal agenda. Be attentive to new, emerging ideas from the interaction.
- Put yourself in your interlocutor's shoes.
- Accept your advisees and their feelings without judgment or reservation. (Don't make assumptions about what they should feel.)

III. **Don't jump into problem solving mode**
- Park your problem-solving mindset; resist the temptation to give advice.
- Trust your advisees" ability to handle their feelings, work through the issues they face, and find solutions.

IV. **Reflecting back**
- Don't assume you fully understand what has been said. Check what you have heard. Share and verify any links and summaries you have made with conversation partners.
- Use reflective listening and conversation techniques (paraphrasing, clarifying, structuring ideas), and ask open and generative questions (see Chapter 8 on standing in inquiry).

V. **Be comfortable with silences**
- Consider silences during a conversation to be fertile spaces.
- Be comfortable with them. (Even actively create them.) They are moments for reflection, when ideas can sink in, and new points and perspectives can emerge.

? ? ? ?

Key questions for the adviser

- How present and how respectful are you in the conversation(s) you are having?
- Are you racing to get your points across, to be seen as the expert? Can you tell when you are just downloading or in factual listening mode?
- Are you embracing the potential for reflection and creation that silences offer?
- How can empathic and generative listening (opening your heart and will) help you to overcome organizational barriers to peace? What gains will they bring to your work as an adviser?
- What steps can you take to begin empathic and generative listening?
- Can you tell when your listening is empathic and generative? How do you “hear” or behave differently? What shifts in attitude, physical behaviour, attention etc. can you identify?
- How can you help others to listen empathically and generatively? How might you create conversations with others that are more open, attentive, and generative?

Resources

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Chapter 06:
Personal agency and navigating interpersonal dynamics

CONTENTS

The personal and interpersonal aspects of advising

Who we are, how we feel, how we see and make sense of the world shapes our interactions with our colleagues, our organizations and the contexts in which we work.

In this chapter we look at how we can support transformation, using ourselves as instruments for change. What do you need to understand in yourself and in your advisees to create trustful environments that allow relationships to prosper? How can you shape advisory relationships to be generative and co-creative?

During our education and in our professional practice, most of us are trained to focus on the *what*: the services we deliver, the products we create, the outputs we produce. Faced by a question, we often apply technical expertise. We seldom pay enough attention to *how* we do things or to our state of mind: how we present ourselves, how we feel, how we make choices, how we build relationships.

In this chapter, we focus on you and your relationship skills. How can you best position yourself to facilitate change? How can you manage difficult advisory dynamics and build trustful relationships? Personal agency, leadership and interpersonal skills are key elements of healthy and successful advisory relationships.

Personal agency

"The success of an intervention depends on the interior condition of the intervener."

Bill O'Brien[21]

The concept of personal agency assumes that individuals have the capacity to consciously influence relationships, change, intended outcomes, and their environment. A person who exercises personal agency is aware of the influence that she or he has.

The fundamental idea behind Bill O'Brien's quote is that a system generates results that reflect the awareness, resourcefulness, and presence of those who contribute to it. We often think that change is something "far out there" that has little or nothing to do with us, how we are, what we feel, or our qualities and roles. That is how many of us have been educated and socialised. In some cultural settings, the status of objectivity and professionalism is such that the personal sphere is ignored or even deemed unimportant.

We ask you to think of yourself as part of a system. There is a connection and an intricate interaction between our inner world (how we are present and show up, our state of mind,

21. Bill O'Brien, former CEO of Hanover Insurance, was known for his systems approach to organizational change. Otto Scharmer uses this quote when explaining an awareness-based approach to systems change in his book "Theory U: Leading from the Future as it emerges" (see Chapter 7 on advising for systems change).

the emotions and values that we communicate) and the outer world (what we do and the results we produce). Who we are, how we feel, how we see and make sense of the world shapes our interactions with our colleagues, our organizations and the contexts in which we work.

Skilfully navigating interpersonal dynamics requires us to look honestly at our inner self, our thoughts, feelings and needs. In fact, to be an effective adviser and to support positive change, you need to access a personal space in yourself that is the source of resourcefulness, motivation and inner strength.

In this chapter, we review several elements that contribute to activating our sense of personal agency and help us to navigate interpersonal relationships in complex environments. We discuss what awareness means; how we can tune in to our thoughts, feelings and needs; how values drive our professional motivation; how our defence mechanisms can distort our ability to manage obstacles; and the importance of self-care and resourcefulness. Strengthening your awareness and skill in these areas will help you to respond effectively to challenging situations and interactions.

Interpersonal realities and systemic change

Relationships do not occur in a void. The interactions between advisers and advisees, and the relationships advisers build, are influenced by institutional systems and the social environment. Deep-rooted histories of conflict and trauma, systemic discrimination, and power disparities, for example, continue to affect our interpersonal dynamics and regularly present challenges for advisers who try to achieve positive change.

In these circumstances, it helps to regularly discern the different levels at which change needs to happen: systemic, organizational, personal. Which recurring patterns are systemic? Where are problems of behaviour or performance due to institutional dynamics? What issues need to be addressed at the level of individual relationships? Each level should be distinguished, but it is useful to remember that they are also interconnected. At the end of the day, we embody the very systems that we want to change. To catalyse broader systemic change and transformation, it is key to notice, try to engage with and possibly change the mental models of the individuals and groups we are working with. (See Chapter 7 on systems change.)

Connection and trust both play key roles in shifting people's mindsets. **No transformation or change happens without connection.** The investment that advisers make in interpersonal connections is therefore central to their work.

Awareness of ourselves

"We don't see things as they are; we see them as we are."

Anaïs Nin

Advisers need to be aware of themselves and what they contribute as much as they need to be aware of their advisees and counterparts. Being aware means being conscious. It includes the capacity to look at ourselves, at what is important to us; to recognise our way of experiencing the world, the ways we make sense of it, the effects of our attitudes and actions. Having acquired an awareness of ourselves, we can extend it to others. Awareness helps advisers to connect with themselves and their advisees and consciously shape the interactions they have.

What elements influence you, how you experience the world, how you make sense of it?

Figure 12. The elements that influence and shape our identities. Graphic by Interpeace.

Many elements influence our thinking, seeing, feeling, and relating. Some are connected to our identities; they make us who we are. Our racial identity or ethnicity, our age, our sex and gender identity, our belief system(s), the culture(s) we were brought up in, the privileges we did or did not have: these have a big influence on what we see, how we see, and our values.

A young adviser starting out is likely to have different motivations and approaches than an adviser who has been working for decades. An adviser who works in English but whose first language is not English is likely to interpret certain concepts differently from a native English speaker. An adviser with a military education is likely to experience hierarchies in a different way than an adviser with a civilian background. An adviser with a refugee background is likely to relate more personally to violence and trauma than colleagues who have not experienced war and flight. Advisers who recognise privileges from which they benefit (for example, because they work for international organizations) are more likely to be sensitive to power inequities and discrimination when they interact with advisees.

Gender and advising

In advising, gender dynamics can play a big role. For some female advisers, it can be a source of distress. Female advisers may experience discrimination by staff and colleagues in their work environment. They may not be taken seriously; their opinions may be ignored. Some advisers who focus on gender have to work hard to ensure that it is given attention. Advisers who experience such obstacles may feel insecure and question their own expertise, or themselves. Others feel lonely; or feel disempowered, or angry. Intercultural or age discrimination can have similar effects. In such situations, female and male advisers need to protect themselves and these elements of their identity.

Gender discrimination is consistently linked to broader issues of power, and power inequities that are systemic in nature. If an adviser addresses it purely in individual or relational terms, it usually puts an added burden on the person who has experienced discrimination; it can make them feel even angrier or more helpless. It is crucial to understand that systemic inequities cannot be removed by individual action alone. Their institutional, cultural and systemic expression needs to be understood and addressed alongside their interpersonal effects.

Institutional effects of gender discrimination that are entrenched in an organization or a country cannot be "solved" by an individual's actions alone. You will need to separate out the biases and behaviours that need to be redressed, decide on which level (and by whom) they need to be tackled, and eventually develop a different change strategy for each. By doing this, you will be in a better position to analyse issues of systemic discrimination, find points of leverage for change, and respond appropriately to your own situation and the situation of advisees.

Awareness of the elements that make up our identity helps us to understand how we position ourselves in professional and work settings. Identity is not a static condition. Its elements coexist within us and change as we move through different stages in life.

Exploring your identity and the identity of your advisees will reveal differences and characteristics you share; both can strengthen your relationship. It is important to identify assumptions, stereotypes, and unconscious biases that may be present. Actively questioning and challenging these, alongside an attitude of open-mindedness and genuine curiosity, will build trust and take your relationship forward.

The personal iceberg

Better understanding of our "interior conditions" and those of our advisees is essential. It is increasingly recognised that in modern professional environments we need to understand people in their entirety – including their deeper needs, emotions and thoughts. The "Personal Iceberg" (Figure 13) is a tool that visualises the sources of our behaviours and actions and those of our peers.

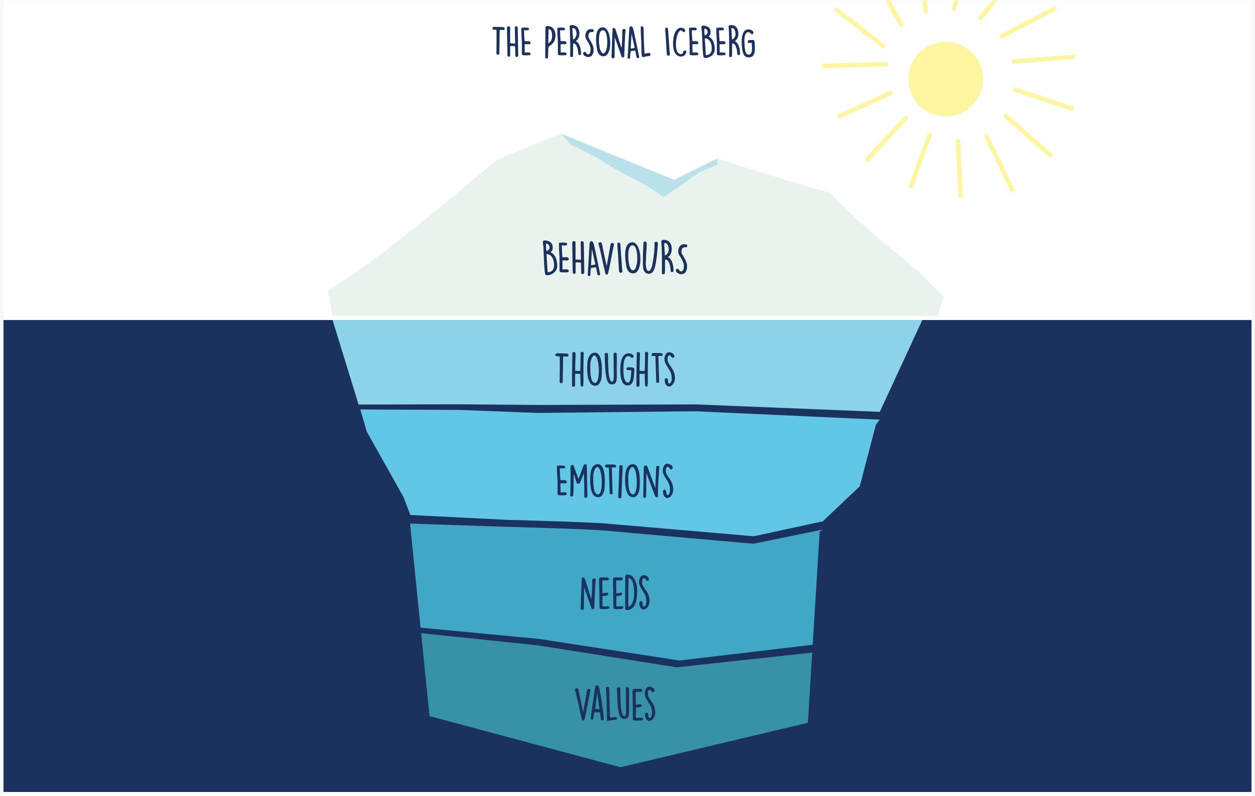

Figure 13 The Personal Iceberg.[22] Graphic by Interpeace.

Self-inquiry: some questions

As an adviser, you might want to reflect on the following questions:

- Why do I behave as I do?
- Am I making choices or am I in "automatic" mode?
- How intentional are my actions?
- Am I thinking about the intended and unintended effects of my decisions and behaviour?

22. The origins of the personal iceberg can be attributed to psychotherapist Virginia Satir, who has been recognised for her approach to family therapy.

On the surface, our interactions are visible and declare themselves in how we communicate, act and behave. The iceberg demonstrates, however, that most of what drives our own and others" behaviours is “below the surface”; and often we are not entirely conscious of it. Each layer under the surface represents a dimension of human experience that is unique to each individual. If we explore these dimensions without judgment, paying attention to how we experience them, we can better understand who we are and what drives us. Noting our thoughts carefully, for example, will throw light on our assumptions, world beliefs, and the ideas we have of ourselves and other people.

“Self-awareness and presence are key for connection, engaging and responding.”

Course participant

Understanding emotions and needs

If you consistently consider needs and emotions in your advising, you will obtain personal, interpersonal and relational clues that will help you to manage your own needs and emotions and those of your advisees. Doing this requires serious self-reflection and honesty.

Emotions often dominate our interactions. As we learn about them, we can better interpret the information they hold. We do not want our emotions to govern us; but we need to pay attention to them because they influence our behaviour and state of mind. Understanding this, and that emotions are contagious, can help us both to be mindful of, and actively manage, our state.

In many cases, our emotional responses have an association with previous experiences that caused us to experience similar emotions. Adopting a curious attitude with respect to our emotions can help us better understand what triggers them and make sense of why they occur.

An emotion is not just a positive or negative feeling; it signals the degree to which our needs or those of our advisee are being met. For example, anger signals that a need is not met. If you can “read” emotions and their meaning, you will be in a position to start to interpret the needs of your advisees. According to circumstances, you can make the analysis privately, or together with the advisee. See Figure 14 for a list of different emotions.

Consciously or unconsciously, we try to meet our needs, whether these are professional or personal. For example, we may need our professional expertise to be acknowledged, or need our colleagues to trust us. Our needs can affect how we operate. For example, if I desire to be more known, I may push myself forward and as a result lose my ability to listen. If I feel unprotected and unsupported, I may be unwilling to take initiatives.

Being aware of our ambitions and needs is the first step towards achieving them in healthy ways. Working in alignment with our needs helps us to thrive, but also creates space in us to recognise and respond to the needs of others. As an adviser, you can consciously create conditions in which your advisees are empowered and can flourish.

Advisers who have experience of stakeholder analysis will be familiar with this type of approach because the methodology involves mapping stakeholder positions and interests. The aim is to map declared positions and articulated interests (above the iceberg's waterline) as well as unexpressed wants and underlying needs (below the iceberg's waterline).

The tables below on emotions, needs and later on values, are intended to provide advisors with a richer "vocabulary" to help identify and name the emotions, needs and values which play out within themselves and within their advisory relationships.

Emotions

AFRAID
Panicked
Overwhelmed
Restless
Anxious
Confused
Frantic
Nervous
Worried
Hesitant
Terrified

CONNECTED
Affectionate
Compassionate
Loving
Sensual
Caring
Grateful
Passionate
Loved
Accepted

HAPPY
Alive
Excited
Joyful
Carefree
Ecstatic
Motivated
Delighted
Playful

SAD
Grief
Lonely
Disappointed
Hopeless
Depressed
Miserable
Empty
Lost
Regretful
Disconnected
Tired
Vulnerable
Hurt
Upset

ANGRY
Furious
Annoyed
Jealous
Helpless
Enraged
Frustrated
Impatient
Irritable
Resentful

PROUD
Confident
Capable
Determined
Strong
Fulfilled
Brave
Appreciated
Honoured
Respected

CENTERED
Relieved
Hopeful
Serene
Secure
Free
Calm
Clear
Peaceful
Whole

ASHAMED
Guilty
Embarrassed
Insignificant
Humiliated
Awkward
Insecure
Worthless

DISGUSTED
Shocked
Hateful
Dislike

AWED
Curious
Moved
Inspired
Impressed
Engaged

Figure 14. A range of emotions. Graphic by Interpeace.

If you consistently consider needs and emotions in your advising, you will obtain personal, interpersonal and relational clues that will help you to manage your own needs and emotions and those of your advisees. Doing this requires serious self-reflection and honesty. But it is a powerful resource that can increase your options, your flexibility, your capacities, and your wellbeing in (challenging) professional environments.

Needs

PLAY
Fun
Relaxation
Play
Variety
Ease
Engagement

COMFORT
Food
Water
Light
Air
Space
Warmth
Movement
Rest
Health
Care
Abundance
Prosperity
Luxury

GROW
Challenge
Adventure
Creativity
Learn
Succeed
Achieve
Take risks

MEANING
To add value
Meaning
Purpose
Wisdom
Inspiration
Beauty
Awareness
Adventure
Truth
Have a cause
Have a task
Fulfilment

COMMUNICATION
Be heard
Be listened to
Share
Talk
Comment

SAFETY
Security
Safety
Protected
Fully informed
Stable
Vigilant
Deliberate
Cautious

FREEDOM
Freedom
Choice
Control
Autonomous
Power
Make it happen
Industrious
Self-reliant
Authenticity
Integrity
Authority

CLARITY
Consistent
Ordered
Sequential
Structure
Knowledge
Informed
Simplicity
Accuracy
Precision
Efficiency
Skill
Competence

SUPPORT
Be helped
Encouraged
Celebrated

RELATIONSHIP
Influence
Cooperation
Partnership
Collaboration
Sharing
Commitment
Connection
Agreement
Equality
Honesty
Reliability
Sincerity

COMMUNITY
Belonging
Connection
Be included
Participation
Connection
Friendship
Solidarity
Loyalty

PEACE
Balance
Harmony
Calm
Quiet
Unity

EMPATHY
Understood
Accepted
Respected
Approved
Gentleness
Softness
Forgiveness
Tolerance
Reconciliation

VALUE
Valued
Acknowledged
Praised
Recognised
Appreciated
Validated
Trusted
Useful
To help
Be needed
Be known for
Be noticed
Be remembered
Regarded well
Get credit
Celebrated
Seen

Figure 15. A range of needs. Graphic by Interpeace.

The role of values in advisory work

Values are the deepest level of the iceberg: they drive much of our behaviour. Understanding how our values influence us (at all levels of the iceberg) can increase our interpersonal awareness as advisers. Values shape who we are, how we see the world, how we behave, and how we respond to others. They are at the core of our ethical principles, and the truths and convictions that guide our decision-making - even if we are often not fully aware of them. They are our inner compass.

Values

Family	Love	Kindness	Finances	Knowledge
Freedom	Openness	Career	Forgiveness	Patience
Security	Religion	Learning	Effectiveness	Change
Loyalty	Order	Excellence	Abundance	Prosperity
Intelligence	Joy	Contributing	Innovation	Gratitude
Connection	Play	Spiritualism	Goodness	Endurance
Creativity	Excitement	Wealth	Enjoyment	Justice
Humanity	Faith	Beauty	Friendship	Appreciation
Success	Wisdom	Affection	Relationships	Trusting Your Gut
Respect	Caring	Cooperation	Leadership	Power
Diversity	Personal	Community	Home	Self-Respect
Generosity	Development	Courage	Balance	Happiness
Integrity	Honesty	Honour	Compassion	Harmony
Finesse	Adventure	Wellness	Professionalism	Peace

Figure 16. A list of values. Graphic by Interpeace.

However, we usually become most aware of our values when they are questioned or tested by another person, a situation or the wider context. In conflict-affected settings, and situations that are uncertain and ambiguous, your values can enable you to stay true to yourself and to your responsibilities as an adviser. At the same time, if you and your advisees do not share the same values, this is likely to bring tension and friction to your professional work, which you will need to manage constructively.

When you run a workshop, for example, you will run it one way if you value order and discipline and another way if you value participation and creativity. You may also value both discipline and creativity. Your challenge is to find appropriate working arrangements, that meet your needs, those of your advisees, and the situation. If you allow certain values to dominate your arrangements and your working relationships, you will be effective in some situations but less effective in others.

Values vary, between individuals and cultures, and over time. Your values may or may not align with the values of your advisees, the professional setting you work in, your community, or the wider society. Some values are quite universal, others are specific to a culture, or determined by ethical worldviews or family traditions. Some values are very personal, chosen by the individual. In an intercultural work setting, you need to make yourself aware of culture-specific values that may influence your work or your work environment.

Some values have intrinsic worth, such as love, truth, freedom. Others are considered sacred or moral imperatives by certain groups. People will rarely compromise values they perceive to be “sacred”. Other values (ambition, achievement, responsibility, courage) are more likely to be instrumental, or a means to an end; on the whole, people are more prepared to compromise such values.

When you take decisions, you will often have to weigh values against one another and choose to elevate one and deprioritise another. For example, you might need to balance your ambition to be professionally successful against your desire and duty to spend time with your family. In a work setting, you might need to balance your desire to be efficient (and meet tight deadlines) against your desire to nurture collaborative relationships and the development of staff.

In certain situations, you may set your values aside. For example, you may value the freedom to organize your own work environment, but, to maintain the standard of living of your family, you may agree to work for an employer that tightly defines your schedule and working conditions.

Others may not like that you express your values. As an adviser, you may prefer to speak frankly, but your advisees may consider your approach aggressive. Make yourself aware of such sources of potential conflict. From a professional perspective, it is essential to recognise that the values you hold as important are not universally held: your advisees may perceive them differently and, in other settings and situations, they may be expressed differently.

As a result, in any assignment your personal values are unlikely to align perfectly with those of your advisees or your working context. This may impact the adviser-advisee relationship and, it can be distressing when the “value-gap” is wide. If you are obliged to work in a manner that clashes with your core values, the situation may become mentally and emotionally unhealthy. Because your values are among the most important motivators and drivers in your life, if the mismatch is severe you may need, as a last resort, to switch jobs or assignments. In most cases, however, you can aim to manage the situation in a deliberate and adaptive manner, making full use of your awareness and resourcefulness.

An ethical dilemma in humanitarian assistance

Numerous ethical choices arise in acute humanitarian crises. Research has shown that decisions made at the beginning of crisis interventions have long-term impacts on the socio-political situation, especially in conflict-affected contexts, and that these are often unintended and negative.

Ethical choices might concern how beneficiaries are selected; how aid is procured or delivered; and what needs are prioritised. It may be necessary to compromise on the parameters of how immediate assistance is provided to make long-term assistance possible, or vice versa. To deliver any assistance at all, creative negotiations with local actors , including e.g. armed groups or corrupt systems, might be required - a clear trade-off. These are classic aid dilemmas.[23] Our hypothetical adviser might be advising other managers or making decisions directly: ultimately, in either case, she must exercise her personal judgement and stand up for what she considers to be the most effective programming that is consistent with her values.

23. The Do No Harm framework emphasises the links between an initiative and its context, and the importance of relating the actions of organizations (systems, processes) to the behaviour of individuals. Individual behaviour is categorised in terms of respect, accountability, fairness, and transparency (RAFT). These are sometimes described as "implicit ethical messages". While many organizations implement Do No Harm principles, their operational practices still tend to overlook the impact of individual behaviour. See Mary B Anderson (1999), "Do No Harm".

Managing defensiveness

Advisers who are resourceful and understand defensiveness will put themselves in a better place to accompany, motivate and empower their advisees for positive change.

Advisers who operate in misalignment with their values sometimes become defensive. But defensiveness has a range of causes and can take several forms. In this section we consider how advisers can manage defensive feelings with regard to their advisees, the working environment, or situations that are professionally challenging.

Remaining authentic and non-defensive is a key ingredient of collaboration. Defensiveness is one of the main reasons why relationships fail, and this is true of advisory relationships. **Defensiveness impacts your reflection and problem-solving skills and invites everyone else to become defensive, rigid and ineffective.** According to Daniel Goleman, in his book "Primal Leadership", distress not only erodes mental abilities, but makes people less emotionally intelligent: they cannot read the emotions of others accurately and therefore lose the basic skill of empathy.

As a result, social skills are impaired and we get defensive. Managing uncomfortable and stressful situations that make us defensive is at the heart of overcoming resistance, embracing change and transforming conflicts. In Chapter 3 on relational pitfalls, we have explored some defensive patterns (see the Drama triangle). We will now explore other aspects of defensiveness and ways to deal with them.

Usually, we are not aware that we are in "defence mode", because this mechanism operates independently of our conscious mind. Our defence mechanisms are physiological reactions that can take the form of fight, flight or freeze responses.[24] In these states, we may experience a range of physical symptoms that include agitation, rapid breathing, a fast pulse rate, feeling too hot, but also feeling cold, restless, blocked, numb or withdrawn.

Managing uncomfortable and stressful situations that make us defensive is at the heart of overcoming resistance, embracing change and transforming conflicts.

According to James W. Tamm and Ronald J. Luyet, in the book "Radical Collaboration", defensiveness is always based on fear: of threats of course, but also of incompetence, loss, or change. We become defensive and blame others in order to protect ourselves from experiencing our own uncomfortable feelings and thoughts. For example, if we are unwilling to take responsibility for an assignment that is going badly, we blame others. By contrast, an adviser who is not afraid will accept responsibility for what is within her sphere of influence and the errors she makes, and will neither blame others for her faults nor be defensive.

How to uncover hidden defence mechanisms

Defence mechanisms have their roots in personal history. As we grow up, they help us to deal with stress. Gradually they become shelters that protect from uncomfortable or painful feelings. If not recognised and addressed, they can have an undue influence on our adult lives.

As an adviser, you can look for patterns of unhelpful defensive behaviour. Drawing up a personal conflict history may reveal the roots of your defensiveness. What significant conflicts occurred in your life? How did you react to them? How do you engage with uncomfortable feelings and situations? Do you recognise patterns that you acquired in the past that now prevent you from moving forward?

24. Fight, flight and freeze responses are physiological reactions that protect us from danger. Individuals can fight or flee threats; the freeze state is a state of paralysis and resignation.

Defensiveness can take various forms: wanting to be right; playing the victim (see Chapter 3 on Drama and Growth triangles); denial; withdrawal; cynicism; blaming others; shaming others; attacking others; being nice or appeasing; trivialising through humour; catastrophising; obsessive overthinking, etc.[25]

Signs of Defensiveness

1. Loss of humour
2. Taking offense
3. High charge or energy in the body
4. Sudden drop in IQ
5. Wanting to be right ("No question about it")
6. Wanting the last word
7. Flooding with information to prove a point
8. Endless explaining and rationalizing
9. Playing "poor me"
10. Teaching or preaching
11. Rigidity
12. Denial
13. Withdrawal into deadly silence
14. Cynicism
15. Sarcasm
16. Making fun of others (being highly critical)
17. Terminal uniqueness (I'm so special, rules don't apply to me)
18. "It's just my personality, it's just how I am"
19. Not wanting to negotiate
20. Blaming/shaming others
21. Sudden onset of illness or accident
22. Confusion
23. Suddenly tired or sleepy
24. Intellectualizing
25. Acting crazy (the temporary insanity defense)
26. Eccentricity
27. Being too nice
28. Selective deafness
29. Attacking (the best defense is a good offense)
30. Holding a grudge
31. Trivializing with humor
32. Inappropriate laughter or giggling
33. Sour grapes! (I didn't want that anyway!)
34. "I'm aware of that; leave me alone" (defense of awareness)
35. Becoming addicted to alcohol, drugs, shopping, working, gambling, chocolate, social media, smartphones, etc.
36. Personalizing everything
37. All-or-nothing thinking
38. Catastrophizing
39. Fast breathing/heartbeat
40. Cold, clammy skin
41. Hot, sweaty skin
42. Mind reading (I already know what you're thinking)
43. Jumping to conclusions
44. Magnifying everything
45. Minimizing everything
46. Emotional rigidity (if I feel it, it must be true)
47. Tight stomach
48. Speaking too fast
49. Becoming physically immobile
50. Obsessive thinking

Figure 17. Signs of Defensiveness from "Radical Collaboration" by James W. Tamm and Ronald J. Luyet. Graphic by Interpeace.

25. The book "Radical Collaboration" by James W. Tamm and Ronald J. Luyet lists more than one hundred possible defense mechanisms.

It is important to recognise the distinction between defending oneself and being defensive. Sometimes advisers need and should defend themselves; in certain circumstances, you may need to mark clear boundaries, or withdraw altogether. When you do so, your decisions should be consciously reached and considered.

How should advisers deal with their own and advisees" defensiveness? Assuming an attitude of curiosity and empathy towards you and your advisees is a first step. Allow yourself to experience the emotions that accompany difficult situations and acknowledge them. Try to name them and give yourself time to feel the sensations in your body. Remember, as a thinking, feeling, and sensing human being, you can retrieve information from all those levels of experience. You can take a deep dive to explore the iceberg, to ask what your needs are and what really matters to you in that moment.

Once you become aware of your defensiveness, you will be able to manage it better, and will also be able to understand and manage the defensiveness of your advisees. Independently, or with them, you can become cognizant of their thoughts, emotions, needs and values.

Resourcefulness

Being resourceful is about mobilising positive energy, identifying options and choices that you can make, being flexible but rooted, being hopeful and having a sense of inner strength.

Working in complex contexts can be energising and fulfilling, but also draining. While some elements of the environment may be known and familiar, many things will not be. **If you do not take care of your energy and inner resources, you run the risk of exhaustion and burnout.**

As noted, personal energy and mood are contagious: a "negative" mood state will not support a positive change process. In this state, you will not be able to facilitate a constructive process or steer yourself or your advisee in a positive direction. This does not mean that your state must always be positive or (close to) ideal. A negative state should not be denied or pushed away but rather it should be consciously acknowledged. If you have recognised your mood, it becomes possible to manage or even change it.

You can develop your personal agency by consciously managing difficult situations and periods when the work is hard, during which you may have difficulty behaving as you would like and may struggle with yourself. In such challenging periods, in contexts where a sense of hopelessness may prevail, you need to consciously pull together your resources and motivation.

Figure 18. What do your need to be resourceful? Graphic by Interpeace.

Being resourceful means that you are open and have a clear sense of the contributions you can bring to a situation. It is about mobilising positive energy, identifying options and choices that you can make, being flexible but rooted, being hopeful and having a sense of inner strength. In that state, advisers can access their resources and use them to make insights and innovate. Advisers in a state of resourcefulness are able to make careful and appropriate choices about how they respond to advisees, challenging situations, and complex change processes.

Thinking, feeling, sensing

Being resourceful is remembering that you are a thinking but also a feeling and sensing being. It is about absorbing and processing information and insights as a whole person with all your senses: head, heart and body. How can you nurture yourself in a way that allows you to become a larger, richer you? How can you encounter yourself and others with an open mind, open heart and open will? How can you access your inner resources and senses and see all the patterns and relationships at play? How can you access the wisdom you possess? Approaching these questions openly will help you to welcome new insights, be creative and innovate.

Advisers who are resourceful and understand defensiveness will put themselves in a better place to accompany, motivate and empower their advisees for positive change. Many of the contexts in which advisers work are ripe with conflict, tension and human suffering. At the same time, many organizations do not sufficiently prioritise the mental health of their staff. It is therefore even more important that individuals take care of themselves. How you nurture yourself to be and remain resourceful depends very much on individual preferences. For some, physical exercise is key; others choose meditation or mindfulness, or take long walks in nature, dance, or adopt a hobby.

For advisers who work in a demanding professional environment, a support network will be helpful. It enables them to bounce ideas and share reflections and emotions, informally through friends, families or peers, and with their work team. Working with a mentor or a professional coach can also be a helpful accompaniment, at specific moments of tension, during transitions, or long-term. One adviser instituted an informal peer group of advisers who held similar roles in different organizations and countries: the group shared experience but also acted as a personal support network for members who faced challenges.

From reacting to responding

To build trustful adviser-advisee relationships, advisers must be consistently intentional in their actions and navigate challenging interactions mindfully. This entails being aware of their own state, whether they are in a triggered reactive state, or a calm and resourceful state. Advisers who are not aware of how they present themselves, or the energy they communicate, will be detached from themselves or those they advise. They will find it difficult to read the feelings, needs and values of their advisees.

Really connecting with your advisees, finding out what is important to them and helping them integrate their perspectives, needs, and values, will generate conversations that truly matter. In any change process, you are likely to face resistance, but true conversations will make it possible to understand what lies behind obstacles and work with them (see Chapter 10 on working with resistance).

To respond to challenges, advisers need to operate from a place of inquiry and have a long-term vision that takes account of the adviser's goals (or those of their organization) and the advisee's objectives. It should also integrate the transformation processes they are part of and the underlying needs they want to meet. Supporting processes of change in complex contexts requires advisers to take care of themselves so that they can respond with openness, compassion and hope.

REACT

1. Triggered state
2. Unaware of yourself and others
3. Blaming and shaming
4. Defending own views
5. Unproductive
6. Jumping to conclusions
7. Short-sightedness
8. My way

DEFENSIVE

Response associated with fight, flight or freeze.

RESPOND

1. Calm, present and resourceful
2. Connected to yourself and others
3. Confirming your values and helping advisees to integrate their values
4. Having a real conversation
5. Co-creative, productive
6. Curious and open minded
7. Long-term view
8. Our way: win-win

MINDFUL

Response that is grounded, open-minded and clear, purposeful, compassionate, hopeful and optimistic.

Figure 19. The differences between a defensive reaction and a mindful response. Graphic by Interpeace.

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Key questions for the adviser

- What are you trying to achieve? What is your aim?
- Are you aware of your influence and impact? What are your capacities and capabilities? How consciously do you apply these to shape positive relationships, influence and impact your environment?
- How would you describe your presence, awareness and attention?
- Are you operating from a resourceful place? If not, what do you need to do to be resourceful?
- What elements of your identity explicitly or implicitly shape the role, position and attitudes you adopt in your advisory work?
- How regularly do you examine your assumptions, biases and judgements?
- Do you understand your advisees" values and needs?
- How do you deal with your emotions? How do you deal with your advisees" emotions? How good are you at naming your emotions?
- What needs and values influence the way you approach your work? Which needs are regularly met and which are not met?
- What are your most important values? How do they shape your work? Which values are you prepared to compromise on and which not?
- Is your current assignment aligned with your values and needs? If not, can you manage for now or do you need to adapt or change anything?
- How consciously do you "read" your advisees" thoughts, emotions, needs and values? What do you need to do to include them in your approach?
- Are you trusted by your advisees? Are you building their trust successfully?
- Do you know your triggers? What defence mechanisms do you show when you are triggered?
- What strategies help you to be in a responsive state? Can you recognise a state of clarity, groundedness and hope? How do challenging situations influence your state of mind?

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Chapter 7:
Engaging with complexity and systems change

CONTENTS

Advisers often work in settings and on issues that are complex. Such contexts and issues are multidimensional, multifaceted and have no single solution. To operate in such environments, an adviser needs (1) a mindset that embraces complexity as the natural order of things, (2) frameworks that can accommodate complex issues and systems, and (3) nonlinear and adaptive approaches to shift patterns and contribute to change. Several questions arise for advisers who seek to change complex systems. How can I understand and navigate such systems? How can I adopt a systems perspective? What are the conditions for system change? Where are the points of leverage?

This chapter does not provide detailed descriptions of systems theory or complexity. It introduces some basic concepts, and then focuses on understanding how advisers can work to change systems, taking inspiration from two well-known approaches: FSG's[26] work on the conditions of systems change; and Donella Meadows" work on leverage points for change, adapted for advisers working in peace and conflict settings.

What is systems thinking?

We are surrounded by complex systems (schools, governments, factories, hospitals, conflict systems, etc.); and our families, bodies and bicycles are systems too. Broadly speaking, systems have elements that are interconnected and dependent on each other; human systems consist of relationships, factors, actors, and mindsets that determine how things take place in a sector, a space, a professional context, etc.

Systems thinking helps advisers to navigate complexity. Our education and the organizations we work with have often taught us to divide the world into simplified and manageable units: sectors, forms of expertise, procedures, programmes. We are trained to apply linear cause-and-effect logics in our work (and outside it). **Systems thinking helps us to engage with the world as it really is – a complex organic evolving constellation of interrelated issues.** Systems thinking is a mindset. It is a way of seeing dynamic interconnections between structures, behaviours and relationships that can help us understand the whole and discern how specific elements of a system link with others, usually in many ways. Linkages may not be obvious and may only become visible over time.

Systems Change is about shifting the conditions and patterns that are holding the problem in place.

In recent years, systems thinking has gained traction in various sectors, including international cooperation and philanthropy. In the last decade, it has become common wisdom to say that complex issues cannot be solved by a single actor using linear approaches. Systems change requires an adaptive and collective approach, and a different kind of engagement. In general, most policies and organizational practices still follow linear models and good practice approaches are not adapting fast enough to our complex and rapidly evolving environment.

26. FSG is a global non-profit social advisory firm. Among other areas of work, it focuses on systems thinking and collective impact approaches. More on their work: www.fsg.org/about/why-fsg.

Avoiding "fixes that fail"

Systems thinking tries to help us to avoid "fixes that fail" because they apply simple linear logic to resolve complex problems. There have been many such attempts. For example, in the field of humanitarian aid, food aid programmes can inadvertently undermine local economies, leading to lower agricultural productivity, depressed commodity prices, and diminished job opportunities for local people.

Organizational change processes provide another example. Frequent efforts are made to make heavy administrative systems more efficient by redesigning organizational charts, but these rarely bring long-term results if the reform does not consider the relations between teams and issues, the organization's culture and its incentive structures. A dysfunctional structure is one dimension, but deeper relational and attitudinal issues need to be addressed simultaneously.

The challenge of embracing complexity and understanding systems in our work

Advisers" assignments often have terms of reference or job descriptions that list clear deliverables and timelines. If situations are complex, however, assignments frequently become much less straightforward than when they first appeared on paper.

A key challenge is that "complex" is often misunderstood to mean "complicated". Complicated problems are composed of elements that are distinguishable and can be addressed one by one. These systems can be controlled and the problems they present can often be resolved. For example, engineering problems (building a bridge, constructing an electric car, pumping oil from below ground) are often complicated; but they are not complex in themselves. Complex issues are the product of numerous interactions that cannot be individually controlled, where there is no simple, linear cause-and-effect relationship. Most human systems are complex (and some but not all are also complicated): managing people, raising children, influencing climate change, understanding and influencing conflict systems. Complex issues must be addressed as entire systems, not in terms of their separate parts; they cannot be tackled successfully piecemeal. The absence of simple linearities means also that they cannot be "solved" in a predictable and planned way, but must be managed adaptively. You must respond to and influence patterns as they emerge, and then respond again to the effects of your intervention. In Donella Meadows" words, you must learn to "dance with the system".

Systems Change best when they change themselves.

For advisers, steering their advisees away from deceptive "quick fixes that fail", and convincing them to embrace a more "complex" (but not necessarily complicated) and nuanced understanding of problems is a key challenge. How can you persuade your advisees to put aside the search for simple answers and accept that many stakeholders will need to take action from many directions to change one part of a system? Worse, how can you do that when you do not fully understand what the "problem" is?

The task of advisers is therefore to shift gears, become advocates of complexity thinking, and assist their advisees to learn how to react responsively when they intervene to change systems.

> **This course gives you a great set of tools to think through steps you can take yourself to be more effective in an advisory role. What I learned is that it starts with standing in inquiry and seeing how you are part of a system. This is about being open to others before you make decisions on how you will approach any given scenario.**
>
> *Course participant*

Seeing patterns and layers in a system

In this section, we discuss the concepts that FSG and Meadows developed to address aspects of complexity. FSG formulated six conditions of systems change; and we have adapted Meadows model of leverage points for change. These models introduce basic tools for unpacking systems; but, as the "dancing" metaphor suggests, they must be applied adaptively; no answer or approach can be applied simply or mechanically.

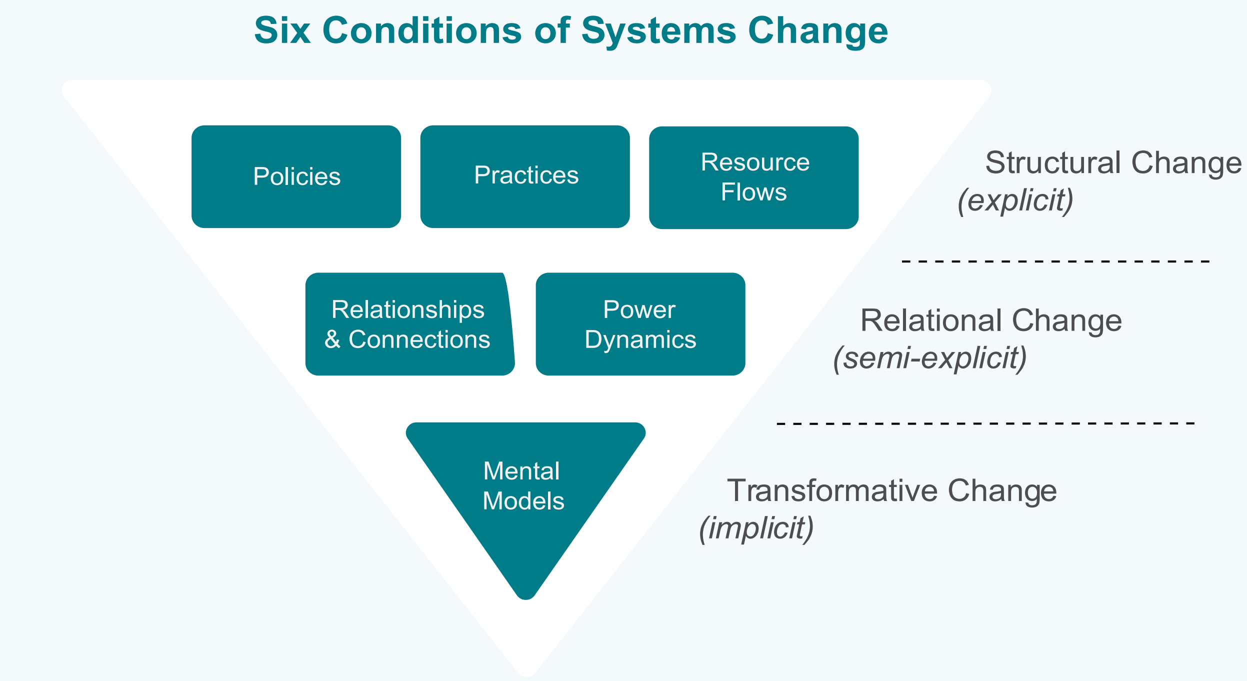

Figure 20. Six Conditions of Systems Change. Source: Kania/Kramer/Senge (2018), "The Water of Systems Change", p. 4.

FSG developed the model in Figure 20 to explain the interdependent conditions that typically hold a political, social, or environmental problem in place. It indicates the levels or layers of a system that we need to be aware of.

The model distinguishes three layers:

- **Structural change:** alterations in policies, practices and resource flows that are usually visible and tangible.[27]
- **Relational change:** changes in relations or power dynamics between actors that may be implicit and which determine the ways in which policies, practices and resource flows are really used.
- **Transformative change:** a shift in the underlying mental models that shape actors" relationships and power dynamics as well as policies, practices and resource flows.

In addition, FSG sets out six "elements" of a complex system that can be independently defined, measured, and targeted for change, but which, equally, interact with each other, generating the characteristic patterns of a complex system.

27. FSG uses the term "structural" to name visible, explicit changes. Other authors use "structural" to describe underlying relational and power dynamics and rules-of-the-game. FSG would probably put these in the category of "mental models".

Definitions of the six conditions of systems change

Policies: Government, institutional and organizational rules, regulations, and priorities that guide the entity's own and others" actions.

Practices: Espoused activities of institutions, coalitions, networks, and other entities targeted to improving social and environmental progress. Also, within the entity, the procedures, guidelines, or informal shared habits that comprise their work.

Resource Flows: How money, people, knowledge, information, and other assets such as infrastructure are allocated and distributed.

Relationships & Connections: Quality of connections and communication occurring among actors in the system, especially among those with differing histories and viewpoints.

Power Dynamics: The distribution of decision-making power, authority, and both formal and informal influence among individuals and organizations.

Mental Models: Habits of thought—deeply held beliefs and assumptions and taken-for-granted ways of operating that influence how we think, what we do, and how we talk.

Figure 21. Explanation of terms used in the six conditions of systems change. Source: Kania/Kramer/Senge (2018), "The Water of Systems Change", p. 4.

In relation to these three layers and six elements, FSG notes that:

- Shifts in system conditions are more likely to be sustained when they are active in all three levels of change. The triangle does not represent a hierarchy or sequence. To be sustainable, change efforts should occur simultaneously at different levels.
- Mental models drive activity in any system. It may seem easier to change structures than relationships, power dynamics, and mental models. However, if those do not change, reform will not be sustainable and will not extend beyond small or temporary project settings.
- Changes at different levels can mutually reinforce each other, but can also counteract each other. For example, changes in political and public attitudes may lead to legal reforms, but those reforms are likely to be ineffective if civil society distrusts the politicians who represent them.

For examples that describe how change initiatives can succeed at certain levels but not at others, see FSG's "The Water of Systems Change'[28], and other resources listed at the end of this chapter.

28. More information is available online: www.fsg.org/resource/water_of_systems_change.

To understand and influence complex systems, you will need to consider the specific social, political and cultural characteristics of the environment you want to influence, including its history. Past relationships, events and experiences influence the current behaviour of the system. **Understanding context is key!**

Leverage points for change in a system

FSG's six conditions and three layers will help you to think clearly about change in a system. You still need to identify "levers" you can pull and build on to identify entry points for change.

Decisions about what you will do to influence a system should be based on a realistic assessment of what actions are likely to be effective. In practice, international interventions are too often determined by what external actors believe to be right, agency mandates, or interventions for which donors will provide funds. As a result, international responses are often ineffective or even harmful. Similarly, efforts to integrate peacebuilding practice in organizational processes often flounder because the actors do not fully understand where an organization is ready to permit change (positive levers) and where it will push back (resistance).

Leverage points for change, adapted from Donella Meadows

Points of leverage are **"places in the system where a relatively small change could lead to a large shift in [the system's] behaviour"**.[29]

There is no simple recipe for finding leverage points. They should be seen as a starting point for thinking more broadly about how to promote change in a system.[30] The eight leverage points we have chosen (Figure 22) are adapted from Donella Meadows" work on leverage points and we have illustrated these points drawing on examples from peacebuilding and organizational contexts. They are not comprehensive but are relevant to all kinds of systems. They are set out in order of effectiveness: (1) is the most effective leverage point for change; (8) is the least effective.

Essentially, the eight levers align with FSG's levels of systems change. Leverage points 8, 7 and 6 address structural changes. Leverage points 5, 4 and 3 mainly address changes in relationships. Leverage points 2 and 1 address mindset shifts towards transformational change; these are usually the hardest to achieve but have the highest leverage.

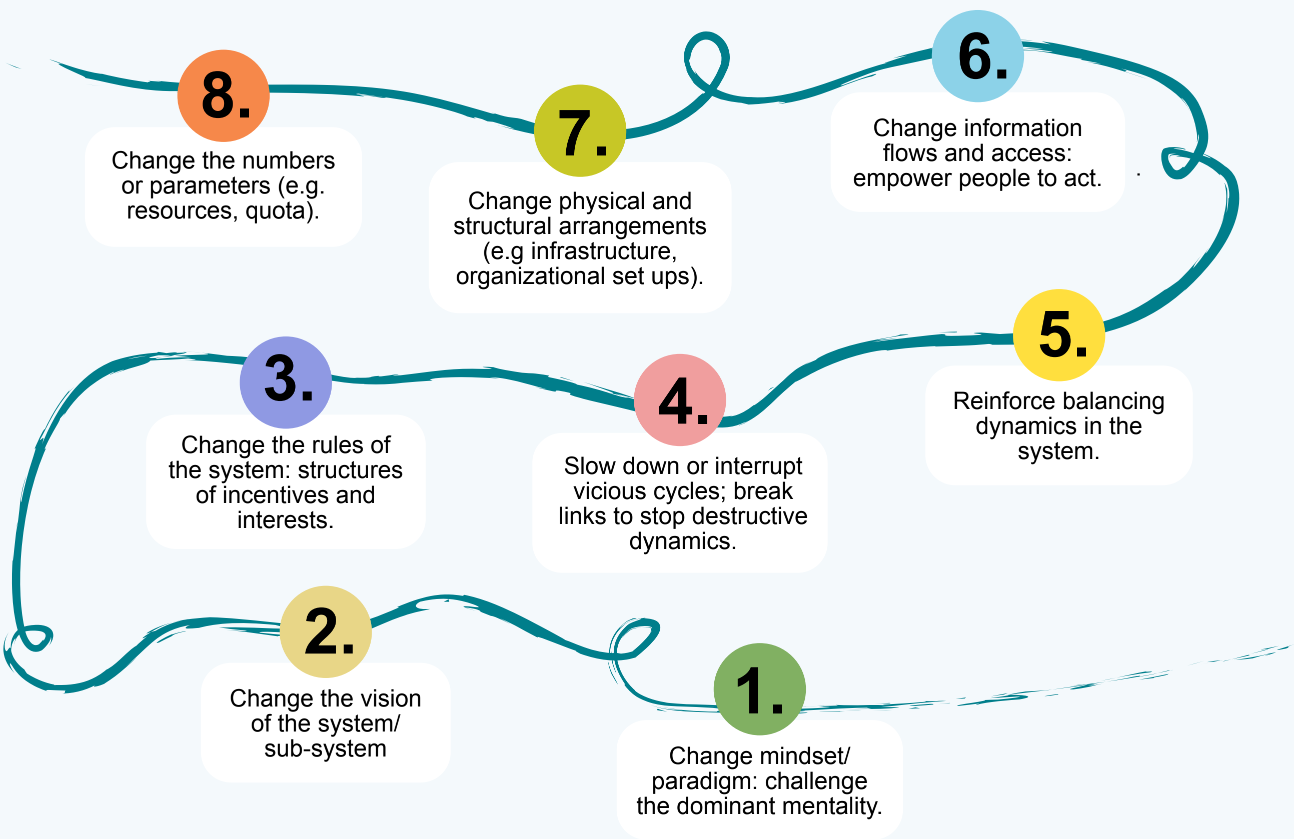

Figure 22. Leverage Points for Change, adapted from Donella Meadows. Points are listed from 8 to 1, in increasing order of effectiveness. 8 = limited leverage. 1 = highest leverage. Graphic by Interpeace.

29. Meadows, H. D., "Thinking in Systems", Part 3, Chapter 6.
30. Donella Meadows, a founder of systems thinking practice, developed a menu of approaches to systems change that she called "leverage points". Her work focused on large, complex, global scale systems, notably the environment. This adapted version was developed by the authors, with inputs by CDA Collaborative Learning to integrate examples from peacebuilding contexts. Her list was longer.

Below, the eight selected leverage points are explained in greater detail:

8. Change the numbers or parameters of the system

The parameters are constants and numbers in a system, such as tax rates, the minimum wage, or how much a society spends on research into specific diseases. They regulate how much goes in and out of a system. They include money and resources (such as the quantity and distribution of aid); hiring and firing people; or setting standards (such as quotas). Parameters can be important in the short run, and may have high leverage if they catalyse with another leverage point. However, they do not have intrinsically high leverage because they rarely change behaviour. Quotas for minorities may enable members of minorities to obtain a significant number of government and other jobs, but this will not guarantee that they are integrated or can influence policy.

7. Change physical and structural arrangements

Physical and structural arrangements connect parts of the system and can have large effects on how a system operates. For example, if industry is concentrated in or near the capital city of a country, this can strongly affect poverty, pollution, rural development, health, youth unemployment, etc. Many organizations have experimented with centralising or decentralising decision-making: these reforms have mixed results in the medium- to long-term, because structural re-arrangements have superficial effects without reform of organizational cultures and mindsets. The only way to fix a system that is not laid out well is to rebuild it; because that is often unfeasible and always slow, it is not a powerful leverage point.

6. Change information flows and access: empower people to act

Missing feedback loops often cause a system to malfunction. Making information available to people who were not receiving it before (in an organization or in a conflict context) can cause people to act differently, and potentially offers powerful leverage. However, the feedback must be provided in appropriate ways and in a form that induces key actors to behave constructively. For example, if companies are required to publish their profits and the taxes they pay, civil society organizations can use that information to advocate for improved government and business accountability. Similarly, if the leaders of an organization decide to share information with staff in a more horizontal and transparent way, they can empower staff and improve decision-making, accountability and performance.

5. Reinforce balancing dynamics

The behaviour of systems is determined by internal "feedback" (recurring effects of elements of the system on other elements of the system). Balancing dynamics are patterns of behaviour and action that cause a system/sub-system to return to a state of equilibrium, or to a desired state, or that counteract a disruptive dynamic (much like a thermostat maintains the temperature in a room). To illustrate, where two parties to a conflict have entered an arms race ("if you buy more weapons, I feel more threatened, and I will buy more weapons"), a balancing dynamic would occur if one party shifted its mental model ("This has got to stop!"). Interventions that reinforce balancing dynamics (in the example, these might be processes of dialogue and de-escalation) can be powerful levers; but they may be short-lived and insufficiently comprehensive to achieve sustainable systems change.

4. Slow down or interrupt vicious cycles; break links to stop destructive dynamics
A reinforcing cycle, or a positive feedback loop, drives growth or development of the system. Growth can be positive or negative, so cycles can be vicious or virtuous, and can be self-reinforcing (the more it works, the more it gains power to work even more). Leverage can be exercised on vicious cycles by breaking the links between the factors that drive them ("x does not have to lead to y"!). In the arms race illustration above, this might involve reducing the threats each side make by means of mutual agreements, guarantees, or the insertion of peacekeeping forces. This lever has potential if it is supported by other change efforts.

3. Change the rules of the system: incentives and interests
Changing the formal and informal norms and procedures that people follow to take decisions and act can induce significant changes in a system. For example, reforms to land ownership laws can gradually have far reaching effects on the distribution of property and wealth. Similarly, a company that decides to turn itself into a workers" cooperative or make the workers shareholders significantly alters its internal incentive and interest structures, creating new challenges and opportunities for employees and managers. Adding elements to processes can also change the dynamics of a system. For example, in one conflict-affected area, elders, women and youth created an early warning monitoring and emergency response mechanism that significantly reduced the level of conflict. The programme introduced new information, mechanisms to de-escalate disputes (a new "rule"), and new interactions (collaboration between elders, women, youth and local government): together, these significantly changed the overall dynamics.

2. Change the vision
A system is driven by interests and forces that interact. This means that if one part of a system changes, other parts are likely to respond (to counter the change, fill a vacuum, exploit a new opportunity, etc.). Most systems also serve numerous purposes, which link to one or more overall "visions". For example, a humanitarian organization's overall vision is to serve people in need, but in the course of doing so it provides jobs and an income to its staff and their families. Efforts to change a complex system's goals or purpose therefore need to take account of all the different visions, and narratives of the vision (whether clearly articulated or more implicit), as well as related incentive structures. Doing this properly usually requires a significant shift in mental models; the potential rewards are high but it is hard to achieve.

1. **Change the mindset/paradigm of the system: challenge the dominant mentality**
Changing the mindset that guides a system and the behaviour of its members has great impact and is particularly difficult to do. Changing a mindset involves challenging shared assumptions about how the world works, including notions of fairness, power, equity, norms of survival, conceptions of what conflict in a given setting is about, and dominant patterns of leadership. Many power-sharing arrangements have failed because the parties had unstated but conflicting conceptions of "fair" distribution of power. Efforts to combat corruption fail in some countries because they ignore the mindset that patronage and corruption are necessary for survival, to provide for extended family (friends, tribe, clan, race, political party…), and are an expression of loyalty. "Zero sum" mindsets (that whatever you gain, I lose) underlie exclusion and favouritism in the contexts in which we work as well as our organizations. If these mindsets are changed, the entire system can change. Mindset change can be led by people in leadership positions who adopt new paradigms and show that they work. It can also occur from "below", if a new mindset starts to inform the actions of many actors in a system. In almost all cases, transforming the mindset of actors across a system, and by association how they behave and do their business, takes very serious amounts of time and effort.

Systems and complexity in peace and conflict work

If you work in complex peace and conflict systems (e.g. at country level), it is likely to be useful and probably necessary to understand what levers can be used to influence these systems positively. This chapter is not about the analysis of peace and conflict systems ("conflict mapping"), but we encourage you to explore peace and conflict systems analysis if you are interested to develop a more holistic understanding of peace and conflict dynamics in the context in which you work, and to think about leverage for change in those (peace and conflict) systems. At the end of this chapter the dedicated resource list on systems analysis and systems mapping can be used for this purpose.

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Key questions for the adviser

We list below some questions and suggestions that will help you "dance with the system".

- The (1) questions focus on understanding and starting to engage with complex systems.
- The (2) questions and table (Figure 23) suggest how you can weave complexity into the job descriptions or terms of reference of your advisory assignments.

1. Understanding leverage and opportunities for change in a system

These questions are relevant to a range of situations, including conflict-affected environments and organizational change processes.

- What parts of the system appear to be static or unchanging?
- Do you really understand why the current system continues to function the way it does? (Ask this question to stop yourself being too idealistic, or from importing assumptions from an external perspective.)
- What is your specific role in the system as an individual? What is the specific role of your organization?
- Where is positive change already happening that you could support?
- At what levels of change do you have influence or leverage? Where might you reinforce a positive dynamic?
- At what levels can you collaborate with others who work on change at other levels? How can you constructively link up?
- Can you support a change dynamic or positive energy that is already present (rather than add new elements)? Where is it present? How might you contribute? Can you identify "bright spots" (dynamics, innovations, champions, etc.)?[31]
- Are you in a position to reduce negative factors, introduce balancing feedback loops, or leverage other events and developments for positive change?
- Can you identify paradoxical impacts (for instance, impacts that are both positive and negative)? Can you make sense of these? What implications do they have for your advisory role?
- What factors, if changed, would exert powerful leverage on the broader system or create a ripple effect? Can they be used to address deeper layers of the system (stakeholder relations, power dynamics, mental models)?[32]

2. Implications for shaping your practice as an adviser

As discussed in Chapter 2 on advisory roles, advisers are often expected to be experts, in possession of answers and solutions. In reality, advisory roles are much more about helping advisees and wider teams to make sense of what is happening, to untangle complex issues, and co-design specific and realistic approaches and collective processes that help them move forward. The table below addresses polarities that advisers often face. Each entry names a tension between what might be conventionally expected of advisers and what might be feasible.[33] We do not suggest that you should do away with the conventional approach (left hand column): but rather try to complement and balance it with elements of systems analysis and complex thinking (right hand column). A balanced mix will increase the effectiveness, impact and sustainability of your work.

31. An example is Interpeace's approach to "peace mapping" (in addition to conflict mapping) and resilience analysis, which seeks to understand which factors helped to create pockets of relative peace in contexts that are otherwise conflictive.
32. "Ripple effect" refers to the multiple knock-on changes that result from a change to one particular factor; just as throwing a stone into a lake causes all kinds of wider circles/ripple effects.
33. Inspired by work of the Human Systems Dynamics Institute – check out their website for more information on pattern logic and managing patterns in a system: www.hsdinstitute.org. See the work of the Polarity Institute for more information on managing polarities: polarityinstitute.com.

Linear, delivery-oriented advisory approach **What advisers are often expected to deliver.**	**A complexity and systems-aware advisory approach** **What the adviser can actually do.**
Solve and fix discrete problems.	**See the patterns in a system.** While some issues may have definite solutions, most advisory challenges are complex and require advisers to understand the patterns in a system and work out how to influence selected patterns. It is important to *weave into your work a more nuanced understanding of the issues you are addressing.* If possible, do so from the inception phase, and *open a conversation with both your sending entity and your advisee.*
Plan the work; deliver planned results and deliverables.	**Remain flexible and sense what is emerging.** *Build in ways to adapt your plans as insights and needs appear.* If necessary, change the direction or scope of your assignment in consultation with your sending organization and advisee. You may adapt your results and deliverables in the same way.
Promise a dependable model. Teach best practices. Deliver reliable, foreseeable outcomes.	**Build adaptive capacity and take advantage of paradox.** *Most complex issues have no simple or singular solutions.* But you can help unpack paradoxes and design strategies that address a range of elements, are adaptable, and deal with opportunities and constraints creatively.
Prove your expertise and fill gaps.	**Stay curious and leverage skills and knowledge.** While your specific and substantive expertise is a good point of departure, often of more importance is the ability to generate ideas, leverage others” knowledge, build on strengths, and facilitate a participatory discovery and action process. *Build up the confidence and energy of your advisees and develop their responsive capacities.*
Fear of failure.	**Take appropriate risks and learn from past experience.** Step away from a “success” and “failure” mindset. *Prefer collective learning and constant adaptation.* Discuss risks, especially with your principal/superiors, and highlight the value of learning difficult lessons about what works and what does not.
Advisers own the problem.	**The advisee owns the problem.** *Help advisees to see that they are part of a system, which their actions affect in intended and unintended, positive and negative ways.* Work with them to determine how they can and how they want to achieve change. Guide the advisee by being as clear as possible about the parameters of your assignment.

Figure 23. A spectrum of engagement for advisers: A linear, delivery-oriented advisory approach versus a systems-aware advisory approach. Most advisers will work somewhere across this continuum of approaches. Graphic by Interpeace.

Formal advisory role descriptions or ToRs may not directly include many elements from the right-hand column (though some will), but skilled advisers can begin to weave awareness of complexity and adaptive thinking from the start of their assignments by drawing elements of the right hand column to the attention of their advisees and the organizations that employ them. You can begin to do so when the scope of an assignment is defined, during the inception phase, and by including moments of reflection and strategy discussions throughout the assignment. Connecting with partners and encouraging contacts to bring different ideas to the table, or simply talking openly with advisees about implicit assumptions, help to create a richer and more comprehensive understanding. Taking time at the start to achieve clarity can avoid disappointment and unmet expectations (that might otherwise not even be articulated) later on.

Much depends on the relational skills of the adviser and the quality of the relationship between the adviser and advisee. If you find yourself in a very complex situation, do not make the error of turning the assignment into one that is manageable or "easy to implement". If you do so, your assignment, and your relationship with your advisee, are both likely to fail.

Peacebuilding and effective advising are not rocket science, it's harder. This course has provided many tools to make this hard journey somewhat easier."

Course participant

"If a factory is torn down but the rationality which produced it is left standing, then that rationality will simply produce another factory. If a revolution destroys a government, but the systematic patterns of thought that produced that government are left intact, then those patterns will repeat themselves…. There is so much talk about the system. And so little understanding."

Robert Pirsig, Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance

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Chapter 8:
From inquiry to adaptive action

CONTENTS

When navigating complexity and uncertainty, it is essential to stay curious and open, adopt an "inquiring" mindset and be adaptable, in order to be able to respond flexibly and in a nuanced manner to unexpected and contradictory information. In this chapter, we explore how and why it is useful to ask good questions. What questions help to identify new ways forward in complex environments? How can an attitude of inquiry help us to advise? This chapter draws on inquiry-based learning approaches and more specifically on materials developed by the Human Systems Dynamics Institute on the concept of "standing in inquiry".

Why it is important to stand in inquiry and ask (good) questions

A curious and inquiring state of mind interrogates every interaction, situation, and opportunity. What can be learned from this person, this environment, this dilemma? By standing in inquiry you can put yourself in a position to gather the information you need to understand and influence patterns of interaction and behaviour. If you work in complex environments, this is especially important.

Asking good questions is rooted in being open and having an attitude of inquiry. This implies a willingness to accommodate ambiguity, remain open to unforeseen insights and opportunities, and be aware of your own attitudes and role in relationships.

Standing in inquiry does not mean that you set aside previous experience. On the contrary. You draw on your experience to test what you hear; but you do not allow past experience to determine your interpretation of what you see and hear, and as much as possible you approach your assignment with the freshness of a "beginners mind". Avoid going into a "download" mode (see Chapter 5 on active listening).

An inquiring mind is not just about asking good questions. You remain curious; you explore what makes people and their environments behave in the way they do. Answers often have a short shelf-life, but good questions have an enduring value if they help to reveal deeper patterns in a system. And because you are working in situations that are complex and unpredictable, you need to continue to ask questions and remain open-minded. For advisers, this is an essential adaptive capacity. There is no "one size fits all" answer.

The practice of “standing in inquiry” links back to the idea of “generative listening” (see Chapter 5 on active listening). You ask questions and listen to what is said, but also for what is withheld, unsaid, or still unrecognised. This process leads you to ask follow-up questions, always listening to the answers but also for the spaces behind them. In fact, active listening is a pre-condition of true inquiry: you must listen to yourself, others, and the wider environment. You need to learn to be aware of your biases and assumptions, and pro-actively detach yourself from them as you listen. Put yourself in an alert, but open and receptive state of mind.

Concretely, how do good questions and an inquiring attitude improve the quality of an adviser’s work? They:

- Increase our situational awareness. We become more aware of the overall context and position ourselves in the wider system.
- Help us avoid the illusion that we know all the answers. Do not let your own “expert” title bias you! It is vital to inquire for as long as possible rather than jump quickly to conclusions.
- Help us to remain open-minded, ready to see what is in front of us in new ways.
- Alert us to different perspectives.
- Assist us to avoid judgments that are influenced by our stereotypes or prejudices.
- Help us to “zoom in” and “zoom out’: to perceive macro-level dynamics and more granular details.
- Enable us to co-create solutions.
- Greatly assist us to remain adaptive, both able and prepared to change positions in the light of new circumstances and information.
- Help us to map variations in the reasoning of those interviewed, and decipher their meaning and consequences.
- Help us to identify different entry points, for further inquiry and ways forward.

> **“Be curious. For an adviser it is essential to ask questions all the time, questions that will open opportunities and new ways of seeing things. We need to listen, to read the emotions, values and opportunities of the people we work with.”**
>
> Course participant

What is a good question? What is an attitude of inquiry?

It takes effort, skill, awareness and practice to ask good questions. There is no formula. It is a skill to be honed; and it must be adjusted to accommodate the context as well as the people you are engaging with. This requires a high degree of intercultural sensitivity. To build rapport and obtain answers that are uncluttered by mistrust or misunderstanding, you need to ask your questions in a way that enables your interlocutor to receive them. The way questions are framed must therefore be appropriate to a given setting. This means that very often you will need to pay attention to how you ask a question as well as understand whether that question is sensitive in that institutional or cultural context.

Here are some tips that you may find helpful:

- **Ask open ended rather than closed or leading questions.** Open ended questions create space for sharing information. They do not cause your interlocutor to feel that you want a certain answer. Closed questions can introduce bias or manipulation; as important, they can lead you to infer conclusions that are false.[34]
  Example of open ended questions: *What is that like? Would you like to say more about xyz…?*

- **Ask follow-up questions.** For your interlocutor, follow-up questions signal that you are listening, that you care and want to know more. They can make the conversation partner feel respected and heard. For you, they enable you to check information that you did not fully understand, to verify attitudes and opinions, and deepen your inquiry. Follow-up questions can be very powerful.
  For example: *Can you explain how you will use the information you have just given me? What exactly did you mean when you said …? Why do you think you believe …?*

- **Exploratory and generative questions.** These can lay the foundation for transformative processes. They open up space for new ideas, insights, and can change how we look at specific situations or problems.
  For example: *What is working well right now? What is one possible change that might have an impact on your situation? What if this situation were to look completely different?*

In addition to framing questions in culturally and organizationally appropriate ways, you may need to adopt an **indirect approach** when you ask about matters that are sensitive. For example, respondents may find it easier to complete an anonymous survey than hold a conversation on certain subjects.

34. It should be noted that open questions are not always to be preferred. For example, in a difficult negotiation process where stakeholders hold their cards close to their chest, open ended questions may be unhelpfully vague or leave too much space for manipulation. More directive or closed questions may advance the conversation further. For more on this and the power of questions, see Alison Wood Brooks and Leslie K. John (2018), "The Surprising Power of Questions".

Asking good questions is rooted in being open and having an attitude of inquiry. In that stance, you are not trying to "resolve" a complex issue, which cannot usually be achieved, but to identify patterns that you can influence. You seek to understand what you do not understand or might disagree with. This implies a willingness to accommodate ambiguity (the ability of your mind to consider more than one description of a situation), remain open to unforeseen insights and opportunities, and be aware of your own attitudes and role in relationships.

Key exploratory and generative questions for advisers

Adapted from the Human Systems Dynamics Institute work on Inquiry[35], the questions below might assist your work with advisees. They are indicative examples and will not be appropriate in every situation.

- What are the three most important things about this moment?
  This question draws your attention to the now and what is. It stops you from being distracted by what was or might be.

- What contradictions do you see?
  Contradictions are important in chaotic environments because they force you to inquire more deeply and may open paths towards change.

- What has surprised you recently?
  Surprise is a precious commodity: in the context of complex systems, it has the potential to generate important insights.

- What do you doubt, and what seems certain?
  This question draws you into inquiry: it invites you to question what you see but also to identify what you do not need to question.

- What should remain the same and what should change in the future?
  This question asks you to apply your judgment, memory, and imagination to describe outcomes you want to achieve.

- What specifically can you do to make a difference?
  This question presses you to act. It helps you name a strategy for achieving the changes and outcomes you desire.

35. Human Systems Dynamics Institute resources on inquiry: https://www.hsdinstitute.org/resources/resources-inquiry.html.

From inquiry to adaptive action

Though many organizations still struggle to operate in a flexible and adaptive way, it is increasingly accepted that adaptive management is an appropriate methodology for organizations that implement strategies and programmes in difficult and unpredictable environments.

Adaptability and responsiveness to changes in context helps an organization to cope with complexity and unpredictability; an inquiring mindset helps to navigate that complexity. An adaptable organization may still make clear choices and commit to specific approaches and activities for agreed periods of time; but it can manage and respond creatively to conditions of constant change. It does so by continuously reading and responding to changes in its organizational, political, and relational environment and recalibrating its actions to accommodate them within its longer term objectives. At an individual level, the adviser and advisee can learn to do the same.

The Human Systems Dynamics Institute proposes a simple but powerful three step process for thinking about adaptive action: **What? So what? Now what?**

- **What is the issue we are trying to understand and do something about?**
  → Unpack the issue to understand it better.
- **So what does this mean?**
  → Understand the meaning, significance and essential implications.
- **Now what are we going to do about it?**
  → Decide what specifically you will do to move the agenda forward.

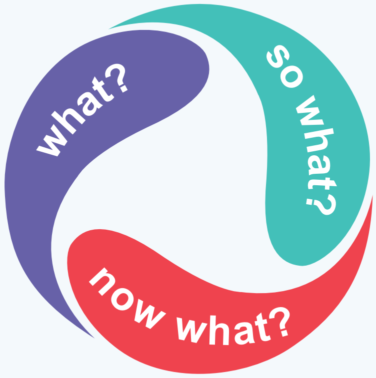

Figure 24. What? So what? Now what? Are three powerful questions to think about adaptive action. Graphic courtesy of Human Systems Dynamics Institute.

Asking good questions is critical at every step.

Some organizations have introduced formal mechanisms to establish adaptive practices, lesson learning, and flexible programming. It is significant that the initial lessons from such processes usually include inquiry at their core:

- **Make small changes in day-to-day practice and organizational habits and behaviour.** Steps might include regular discussions between peers; informal communications; collective team learning (where possible involving several hierarchical levels); short, weekly check-ins; or end-of-day conversations between colleagues. Exchanges should involve discussion of “failures” as well as successes, and may take many forms. If practical discussions are combined with specific changes in practice, an organization can make significant progress towards becoming adaptive.

- **Do not over-formalise adaptive management practices.** Organizations should install mechanisms to translate their commitment to adaptive practice into action. For example, they can devolve authority and decision-making to those who are directly responsible for delivery. In doing this, they should give teams the space to be creative and show initiative.

- **Promote innovative ways to collect and process information.** For example, formally adopt monitoring and evaluation systems that reflect awareness of complexity (such as outcome harvesting methodologies[36]); or feedback mechanisms that encourage staff to voice concerns about unintended consequences. At the same time, complement or displace "upward" forms of accountability (for example, to donors), by developing forms of accountability that are more horizontal and trust based.

- **Focus on mindset as much as structures and processes.** Adaptive management, based on inquiry, is first and foremost a question of mindset: how we look at the world. If individuals and organizations commit to reflective action, flexibility and adaptation, they will often be able to do so through existing structures and procedures. After all, organizational arrangements are essentially vehicles for implementing. For the same reason, changes to organizational arrangements require changes in mindset and attitudes to be successful.

Common challenges

Adopting an inquiring approach requires dedication and you are likely to face questions or resistance. In particular, you may need to deal with two important points:

1. **How does inquiry lead to solutions or action?**
   If you ask questions, advisees may think you are simply making an already complex issue more complicated. Advisers are often expected to find "answers", not raise questions. In Chapter 2, we discussed the role of advisers as "experts" and the value of facilitation and co-created solutions. Inquiry and good questions help to unravel complex patterns and break up systems into manageable elements. You need to find the courage to live with the discomfort or vulnerability that standing in inquiry creates: in essence, you must "hold things in suspense" until the pattern or issue becomes clear, and exercise patience, which observers may confuse with indecision, lack of competence, or even lack of intelligence. The benefits are important: you will be able to understand issues in a deeper way, and move others away from the expectation of quick solutions to a more considered and collective sense of what needs to be done. Part of your role is to explain to your advisees why you adopt the approach you do – even if, at first, they may

36. Outcome Harvesting collects ("harvests") evidence of what has changed, and then, working backwards, determines whether and how an intervention has contributed to these changes. Outcome Harvesting has proven to be especially useful in complex situations when it is not possible to concretely define most of what an intervention aims to achieve, or even, what specific actions will be taken over a multi-year period. For more information, see https://www.betterevaluation.org/en/plan/approach/outcome_harvesting.

doubt its value. Effective advisers are able to hold in tension the need to "get a grip" on a situation and the need to open it out and explore it patiently. Too much openness can be counterproductive; too much direction or commitment to one "solution" can wholly undermine the quality of a process, its outcome or its sustainability.

2. **Dealing with complexity in professional contexts and organizations**
   In fast moving operational environments, asking more questions may not be seen as helpful; its value may only be appreciated in the long-term. For the same reasons, an organization that hires an independent consultant to produce specific deliverables may not want that consultant to start by questioning the terms of reference or objectives. If inquiry reveals that the context is even more complex than expected, this may call into question the purpose or feasibility of the assignment. Here too, you need to hold elements in tension: the imperative to deliver services and the imperative to understand their purpose and effects; the need to be clear and the need to respect complexity; the need for planning and the need for flexibility. To manage and sustain such tensions, relational skills are critical.

From inquiry to adaptive action: a gender and conflict sensitivity example

An organization recruits an adviser to help develop and roll out a programming guide on gender and conflict sensitivity. The organization assumes that teams are currently not gender sensitive because they lack technical knowledge of the issue. The guide is a priority for management and the board of trustees.

When the adviser interviews relevant staff (→ inquiry), she/he discovers that failure to implement gender equality is not due to lack of technical knowledge but to resistance: a majority of staff do not think that gender sensitivity will increase the effectiveness of their programmes, and feel the policy is being imposed by senior management without consultation. They also believe that senior managers do not understand that the gender policy is creating political tensions with local partners and the government.

The adviser therefore revises the purposes of the assignment and adopts a new strategy that will overcome some of the organizational and interpersonal barriers to the policy. The assignment becomes a different, more complex and larger deliverable than the production of guidance.

This is where the adviser's judgement, pragmatism and ability to manage tensions become useful. She/he decides to not push back on the primary deliverable or focus uniquely on organizational on organizational issues (which might not be well received if approached directly); instead, she/he takes a mixed approach, looking for an acceptable way to go forward. She/he delivers programming guidance and roll-out but also incorporates a discussion of the wider organizational issues that have caused staff resistance (→ inquiry!). In this way, she/he is able to frame a longer-term organizational strategy that might permit staff and management to address the problems she/he identified.

? ? ? ?

Key questions for the adviser

The questions below may help you think through your approach to advising and how you manage situations that arise. They focus on your predispositions as an adviser, and are based on the "rules of inquiry" developed by the Human Systems Dynamics Institute.[37]

- **Turn judgment into curiosity.** When you work in a complex environment, what judgments do you make? What questions should you ask (to put those judgements in context or question)? Do you feel defensive or are you open to different points of view and outcomes?

- **Turn disagreement into shared exploration.** When you find yourself in disagreement, what questions do you ask? Do you invite your interlocutor to explore your differences to find a way forward? Do you hold your ground, or do you look for paths that you can explore together?

- **Turn defensiveness into self-reflection.** What questions can you ask that will help you to avoid defensiveness and function more effectively?

- **Turn assumptions into questions.** What assumptions do you hold that impede you from thinking freely? What questions would help to displace those assumptions or put them in context? Do your assumptions cause you to impose your solutions or proposals for action, or are you able to allow proposals to emerge from conversation? Are you willing to accept, support and finetune your advisee's proposals?

37. Human Systems Dynamics Institute resources on inquiry: https://www.hsdinstitute.org/resources/resources-inquiry.html.

Resources

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Chapter 9:
Different approaches to change

CONTENTS

Differing interpretations of what change is and how it is achieved

Explicitly or not, advisers are usually called in to help bring about a change: to help resolve a conflict situation, meet a humanitarian need, deal with a development challenge. The change requested may be internal to an organization or external (involving different actors, institutions, etc.). The desired change may be identified, but in most cases, what is needed to achieve the change is not clearly defined. Are planning and design what is required? Are political dynamics a major factor? Is there a need for additional professional knowledge and skills? Depending on what the underlying issue is, the nature of the adviser's work will be different. Additionally, advisees, the hiring organization, and other actors may perceive the change that is needed in different terms and not share the same mindset. The Colours of Change model presented in this chapter will help you distinguish different approaches to change, explore and discuss what is needed with advisees and others, and adjust your interventions appropriately.

Advisers in the development, humanitarian and peacebuilding fields frequently have to think about change at various levels. This can be for the bigger societal changes they seek to contribute to, the aims of the program they work in, or smaller change interventions. This chapter focuses on this last level of change: the specific changes you help make happen through your own work. During our education and professional career, most of us have learned specific techniques and are used to working with advisees in specific ways (for trainings, workshops, knowledge transfer, tools, etc.). However, the skills and tools you possess can be applied in many ways. Increasing your awareness of change styles and repertoires will improve your effectiveness.

The Colours of Change framework

In this chapter, we use the "Colours of Change" framework developed by Léon de Caluwé and Hans Vermaak, which is based on extensive work on change processes in the public and private sectors. You can use it to reflect on your individual style and how you intervene, as well as to analyse change situations and consider options in supporting more complex change processes. Detailed information on the Colours of Change model can be found in the book "Learning to Change" and related internet resources (see the references section).[38]

De Caluwé and Vermaak observed that the clients they worked with as well as fellow advisers had different (and sometimes conflicting) views of change. They gradually distinguished five basic models, to which they assigned colours. Based on their expertise

38. In Chapter 7 on advising for systems change, we discussed the FSG model (six conditions for systems change) and Donella Meadows" leverage points for change. Exploring these conditions and leverage points can help you to focus your change strategies and identify points of entry for intervention. The Colours of Change model complements these tools by explaining why, in our day-to-day work, we might choose particular styles and forms of intervention to address such change conditions and leverage points.

in organizational development and change management, de Caluwé and Vermaak concluded that these were not personal styles but paradigms, rooted in different ways of thinking. The five colours are set out in Figure 25 below.[39]

	Things/People will change if you:	Change is driven by:
BLUE	• Formulate clear result/goal • Lay down a concrete plan and steps • Monitor and adjust accordingly • Keep things controlled & reduce complexity	**Planning, specification**
YELLOW	• Unite interests • Create win-wins • Show advantages (power, status, influence) • Get on the same wavelength or into negotiations	**Interests, negotiation**
RED	• Make things attractive • Stimulate people by rewards (or penalties) • Manage expectations, create good atmosphere • Use HRM tools for motivation and status	**Motivation, engagement**
GREEN	• Make people see insights/shortcomings • Motivate people to learn/become capable of • Create suitable (collective) learning situations • Gear towards people's own learning goals	**Learning, professionalism**
WHITE	• Start from people's drives, strengths, inclinations • Diagnose complexity and dynamics • Create sense, meaning, purpose, symbols • Enable adaptation and self-organization	**Complexity, self-organisation**

Summarised from De Caluwé, Leon, and Hans Vermaak – "Learning to change: A guide for organization change agents", Sage 2003.

Figure 25. The Colours of Change as lenses to explore an issue or problem. Graphic by Interpeace.

Blue thinking is rooted in engineering, planning, and processes that can be precisely described and controlled. Using typical blue logic, one makes a detailed plan in advance, develops specifications, monitors progress precisely, and sticks to the plan as much as possible.

In **Yellow** thinking, politics, power and interests are key considerations. Creating win-wins, compromises, and agreeing ways forward (that take account of underlying power issues and tensions) are central concerns.

39. Note that the formulations here have been chosen by the authors of this Handbook but are based on the typology of colours developed by De Caluwé and Vermaak.

Red thinking values the motivation and engagement of those involved. It is about creating a sense of togetherness, joint aspiration and engagement. It is a foundation for human resources management, both in its "hard" expression (reward and punish) and "soft" expression (connecting to people's motivations and inner drives).

Green thinking emphasises collective professional qualities, skills and learning. It promotes continuous learning, approaches to professional exchange and development, and learning organizations. The green approach is modern but has old roots that can be found in medieval guilds or traditional networks of craftspeople and professionals.

Finally, **White** thinking concentrates on self-organization and self-steering. It suits complex situations where the nature of the change required, and the way it will be engineered, are not clear or cannot be made clear in advance. It is about emergence, co-creation, adaptation, and flexible use of the other colours when necessary. White thinking is typically appropriate when a difficult issue is not yet understood and cannot be easily reduced to one specific change perspective. In such situations, it remains necessary to mobilise energy for change and a team or an individual could use white thinking to guide them as they work towards a strategy.

Note that the colours are not neatly separate categories. They are ways of thinking that can interrelate. It is nevertheless important to recognise that each colour represents a distinct way of thinking and suggests a specific types of change intervention.

In short: blue is about a **PLAN**, yellow about **AGREEMENT**, red about **ENGAGEMENT** of people and motivation, green about collective **LEARNING,** and white about **SELF-ORGANIZATION**.

Applications of the Colours of Change framework

The colours can be used in different ways. In this section we will examine four uses:

A. As a lens to explore an issue or problem.
B. To specify the type of intervention.
C. To clarify what is expected of an adviser.
D. To review your qualities and preferred styles of working as an adviser.

A. The colours can be used as **lenses to explore** an issue. Each colour offers specific insights and causes you to ask different questions, as suggested in the figure below. If you use them to look at a situation from different angles, it will help you identify the underlying issue and the factors at play.

Using colours as lenses

BLUE QUESTIONS…	Are data and evidence sufficient? Are structures and procedures adequate? Are sound criteria and indicators in place?
YELLOW QUESTIONS…	What different interests are engaged here? Who has power, what are the power dynamics? Are actors sufficiently empowered to engage?
RED QUESTIONS…	Is the atmosphere conducive? Do actors feel appreciated and connected? What are the drivers and feelings?
GREEN QUESTIONS…	What professional qualities are displayed? Is there the ability and readiness to learn? What knowledge is available?
WHITE QUESTIONS…	What are the mental models? What is emerging? Where does energy go? Can we organize flexibly and responsively?

Figure 26. The Colours of Change as lenses to explore an issue or problem. Graphic by Interpeace.

In short: a blue lens may tell you that you need a better plan; a yellow lens may reveal the political and power dimensions between actors, which would require you to examine interests, seek agreement and develop negotiations or consensus-building; a red lens might raise issues of motivation and engagement; a green lens might highlight collective professional expertise and skill; and a white lens might provide guidance on how to manage complexity. And the support interventions that might be needed will depend on what is considered to be the main colour issue to be addressed at this stage.

B. A second way of using the colours is to specify precisely **what intervention** you will undertake, and **what needs to be done** to prepare and implement it. For example, suppose you are asked to facilitate a workshop on "topic X". If you adopt a blue perspective, you will prepare a specific plan for the workshop, identify solutions, and establish tasks with clear deadlines. If you take a green perspective, you will start by raising questions and exploring the issues, facilitating exchange within the team and with others. You will adopt different methods and the expected outcomes will probably be more open. If you adopt a red perspective, you will prioritise the advisee's motivation and the quality of their engagement. This requires an approach that is motivating and pays particular attention to interpersonal dynamics. If you adopt a yellow perspective and want to deal with political and power issues, you will be trying to settle different interests, and are likely to use negotiation to create win-wins and compromises. You may want to organise informal and bilateral conversations first. Finally, if you adopt a white approach, you will seek to create a safe space for open and deep reflection to explore the issue better and find ways forward based on emerging insights, energy for change, and organizational options.

> **Dance with and be strategic when applying different facilitation styles.**
>
> *Course participant*

C. A third use of the colours is to **clarify what an adviser is expected to do** to support a change ambition. Building on the analysis of the issue (A) and the specific interventions required (B), the adviser needs to provide relevant forms of support (C). A simple rule is that, since each colour requires specific skills, personal affinities, and experience, the colours that represent the personal style and preference of the adviser should adequately match the nature of the change process and intervention desired. Each change colour requires a certain repertoire of skills and professional experience of the advisor. Specific methods, tools and ways of working are tied to each colour. Over time, you will finetune the personal affinities, experience, and skills that each colour demands. And thus, you will probably develop a specialisation in certain colours.

> **"Change making is a co-creation and a non-linear process."**
>
> *Course participant*

D. As the most personal use, you can use the colours to **identify your qualities as an adviser**. While reading this chapter, you may have noticed that some colours resonate with you more than others. We all have personal inclinations in relation to the colours. In addition, our approach is strongly shaped by the mental models we have formed during our education, and work environments. As an adviser it is essential to know what you are good at, what you have affinity for, and what you find more uncomfortable or difficult. It can help to discuss your areas of strength and weakness explicitly, with advisees (to clarify the type of implementation of a specific assignment) or colleagues (to discuss your general professional repertoire).[40] If you feel less confident about your ability to manage certain parts of an assignment, consider asking someone else to lead on those parts, or work on them as a team. At the same time, be wary of remaining within your comfort zone too much as this will impede your professional development.

40. Note that it is not uncommon that your dominant mental model does not match your personal repertoire of skills. You may be trained in a "blue" profession (like engineering or accountancy) but actually be someone with affinity for "yellow" processes and skills (in terms of understanding interests, negotiations and compromises), or be more of a "red" person (with a strong focus on teamwork and motivation of colleagues).

Main takeaways

Professionals that have worked with the Colours of Change model propose some general insights that may be helpful to remember when you address change trajectories and your role in them.

- The Colours of Change help **to explore the dimensions** of an issue and build a broad and deep understanding between all involved. They help **different kinds of people** to engage with multiple mental models and preferences of change styles and methods.

- **More complex initiatives and larger change trajectories should not be dominated by one colour.** Nor should larger organizations. Dominance will endanger the vitality of the endeavour or organization and limit the degree to which people with other preferred mental models can participate and contribute their ideas and qualities.

- However, a **specific change intervention** is usually **well served by a dominant colour** – at least at specific moments in time and for specific issues. It ensures that the intervention takes place in a clear manner, and that expectations, rules and results are clear to those who participate. One or more supporting colours may address other dimensions. In complex change processes, it may be helpful to distinguish several (interconnected) workstreams, each of which can be given a specific dominant colour and style of working.

- The colours can be used to **"shift gear" in a change process**. If you are able to apply the different repertoires and styles associated with each colour to address emerging issues and issues that block progress, this will help to keep the process creative and dynamic.

- **The qualities of the adviser or facilitator should fit with key change ambitions** and the underlying problem. Incongruence between the adviser's skills and the requirements of the change effort risks impeding and undermining the process.

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Key questions for the adviser

As a way of thinking about and acting on change, the “Colours of Change” can help you to (a) understand the issue at stake, (b) identify ways to address it, and (c) consider your own role, affinity for certain colours and how this fits with the needs of your assignment.

The following questions may help you to apply the model in your work:

- If I apply each colour to my assignment, what do I learn about the nature of the issue and how I can address it?
- What colour does the advisee (or another actor) use when thinking about change and how to achieve it? Is that an adequate lens? What does the advisee not see? Should I adopt the same colour, choose another, or seek to discuss and possibly help to change the advisee’s perspective?
- Would adoption of one (or two) of the colours improve my own ability to meet the needs of the advisee, other actors, or the situation?
- Do I need to use different colours to work with different actors or stakeholders and to appreciate the different dimensions at stake?
- If I have selected a dominant colour (or combination of colours), what does this tell me about what needs to be prioritised (in terms of type of process, involvement of actors, types of interventions, time path, etc.)? What support colours would improve and diversify the process and the results?
- To what extent does my affinity for certain change colours (my qualities, skills) match what the issue/change ambition/assignment needs? Is the fit good enough to proceed? Do I possess all the relevant skills, or should I team up with others who have complementary strengths?
- If I want to boost my own understanding and skills of change processes, what colour(s) would I want to strengthen? How can I do this?

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Chapter 10:
Working with Resistance

CONTENTS

Many if not most advisers are trying to achieve some form of change, and most will face resistance in the course of their work. It is difficult to welcome resistance as an opportunity. But is it in fact a hindrance for real change? Or should we perceive it as an indication that we have encountered key concerns? Is resistance even a resource that we can use to make change more effective and sustainable?

In this chapter we discuss the reasons and motivations behind resistance, how to approach blockages with curiosity, and how to work with them for better outcomes. The methodology we propose here can be applied to various forms of resistance that advisers face in the context they are trying to influence, and internal resistance within organizations.

How resistance manifests

Resistance indicates that some of those affected by a change process do not support it or do not own it sufficiently. Resistances that advisers encounter take many different forms. Here are a few indicative examples:

- People may resist specific objectives, methods or priorities that they feel an external actor or project has brought in without legitimacy or internal approval.
- People may resist new entities (an unfamiliar person, organization, team, strategy, etc.). An advisee may refuse to hear or even meet an adviser, or reject a process the adviser has proposed.
- Government officials may refuse to take responsibility for, or refuse to lead, national policy changes (for example, policies on gender rights, or national action plans on youth, peace, and security (YPS).
- Country offices may be hesitant to follow the instructions or advice of advisers from regional offices or from headquarters, or vice versa.
- Staff may be unwilling to integrate new approaches in programming, for example, conflict sensitivity, gender sensitivity, human rights, or climate adaptation.
- Staff in an organization may resist to integrate gender equality norms in recruitment or support equal gender access to management and leadership positions.
- Staff in organizations may not be on board with changing their practices and behaviour to implement (rather than merely discuss) change processes that devolve power and leadership to local partners, or promote more equitable relations between international, national and local stakeholders.
- Staff may be hesitant to replace traditional organizational or donor planning methods (based on the logical framework, for example) by more adaptive and responsive models.
- Staff may resist approaches that venture into the unknown (for example, decisions to engage with hard-to-reach groups such as armed groups, private sector actors, youth gangs, people with severe disabilities, etc.).
- People may refuse to participate in or support collective rather than individual programmes or initiatives.

Many other examples could be found. The important point is that advisers can be confronted by forms of resistance that at first sight may appear uncontained and unspecific. **Acknowledging the presence of resistance, rather than ignoring it, is the first step to making progress.** How, therefore, can you spot and recognise it?

How to spot and recognise resistance

Frequently, those who resist change do not openly declare what they are opposed to and why. In consequence, advisers may find it difficult to detect and make sense of what is going on. There is often just a blurred feeling of "stickiness" and lack of movement. Symptoms of resistance include passivity, dissenting behaviour, anger, frustration, defensiveness, refusal to "play along" with a process, active undermining of certain activities, or complete disengagement (Chapter 6 on personal agency can help you reflect on visible behaviours associated with resistance).

The adviser may not be in a position to connect seemingly irritating behaviour with the deeper issues of concern which they relate to (see Figure 13 on the Personal Iceberg). It is therefore important to set aside simplistic assumptions and take the time to understand what is really driving resistance. This is essential if you are to work constructively and creatively with resistance, rather than simply stand against it.

Instead of becoming frustrated by resistance, advisers need to delve deeper to understand the reasons for it. Resistance usually indicates that the adviser has not yet fully understood all dimensions of the issue.

A helpful first step is to identify who is resisting what. Advisers often interact with a range of stakeholders. Drawing a stakeholder map will help you see what issues are divisive, and why.

The four levels of engagement (individual, programmatic, organizational, and systems level) presented in Figure 7 (Chapter 4), can assist this analysis:

1. Resistance on a **personal/interpersonal level** might play out in two ways. Advisees may be defensive or disengage; alternatively, advisers may be resistant, in terms of their behaviour, communication, treatment of the advisee, or personal style.

2. **Projects and programmes** might show resistance for a variety of reasons related to their content, history or objectives. The source of that resistance may be rooted in their personal relationship with the adviser, or may be due to perceptions of the organization in the country of operation. (See points 3 and 4.)

3. At an **organizational level**, resistance may occur very broadly in two ways. Within an organization, teams and leadership may resist an adviser's proposals. Or national actors may dislike an organization's identity, culture or history, its implementation of projects, or conduct of partnerships.

4. On a **systemic level**, resistance can manifest itself in several ways. At a country level, national or local government or civil society stakeholders may object to the overall engagement strategy of multilateral or bilateral actors. Alternatively, international actors may be unwilling to "walk the talk" and adapt to changes in the international aid systems (devolution of power, funding and decision-making to local actors, for example).

Be mindful that resistance may be visible at one level but have its root(s) at another level. Pay attention to the interactions between each level. The examples below show the degree to which resistance may be subtle and may have distant roots.

Three examples of resistance

- As part of an ongoing process of community dialogue, two groups start to unpack issues that have caused tension between them. However, after some time, one group declines to continue to participate. Inquiry may reveal multiple reasons for this reluctance, which is not clearly expressed. For example, one group has come to believe that the adviser favours the other group; there may be misperceptions about the purpose, or the transparency and fairness of the process; or political factors that are independent of the dialogue (for example, an election campaign) may undermine trust between the groups. The adviser needs to develop strategies on how to work with such misperceptions and lack of trust.

- An organizational change process puts effort into clarifying the organizational responsibilities of staff and the configuration of teams. Over time, however, the adviser comes to understand that deeper issues have been missed. Team relationships are dysfunctional; important non-formal types of cooperation have been ignored; and some groups of staff are demotivated or burnt out. The adviser therefore shifts the focus of the assignment to include these factors which helps the levels of resistance to decline.

- Staff from a country office display unwillingness to adopt a mainstreaming policy. They say that they feel their programming area is being marginalised and that HQ is diregarding them. When the adviser explores these grievances, it becomes apparent that the staff she is advising distrust her. She recognises that, to be heard at all, she needs to spend time building a relationship with the local office.

Instead of becoming frustrated by resistance, advisers need to delve deeper to understand the reasons for it. Resistance usually indicates that the adviser has not yet fully understood all dimensions of the issue or the different effects it causes; or has not understood all the drivers that affect advisees" behaviour.

Reasons for resistance

Advisers usually arrive with good intentions, a formal or informal mandate (See Chapter 2) and a toolbox of preferred methods. We assume people want our advice and will be inclined to follow it. In many cases, advisers are hired to facilitate a change process.

However, **change is not a linear process and people may resist the course of action proposed by an adviser for numerous reasons**. For example:[41]

- **Fear.** People may fear change, the unknown. They may fear they lack the competence to change, or fear they will lose status, income, or quality of life, etc. They may also fear criticism by others, or even repercussions if the change process will harm certain interests.

- **Lack of understanding.** People may misunderstand or misrepresent what the change is. Improved communications can sometimes resolve this problem.

- **The change vision is not co-owned.** Resistance is common in cases where change is desired and promoted by one group, or by outsiders, but some stakeholders (in a country, an organization or team) are not consulted or do not participate in designing the change process.

- **Distrust.** Previous experiences may cause staff or other actors to distrust a process, or their leadership. If earlier processes were not participatory or democratic, or failed, people are likely to have become cynical and may be unwilling to try again. Sometimes staff mistrust the adviser.

- **Lack of motivation**. Some might be unwilling to support proposals because they see no advantage for them in doing so. This attitude often reflects deeper social dynamics, or an organizational culture in which incentive structures are aligned with individual interests (or the individual interests of some) but there is no broad shared vision.

- **Tiredness**. In conflict-affected contexts or settings in which numerous external actors seek to play a role, people frequently feel tired and overloaded. This may not be the first change process in which they have participated, and earlier ones may not have been successful. The combination of uncertainty and fatigue undermine motivation and exacerbate resistance.

41. Some of the reasons on this list are inspired by AJ Schuler (2003), "Overcoming Resistance to Change: Top Ten Reasons for Change Resistance", and Kealy Spring (2021), "Overcoming resistance to change in your organization".

- **Risk**. Change will often incur risks or perceived risks. First of all, no-one knows whether the change will be successful. To some, the unknown may seem more hazardous than the status quo. This attitude is particularly evident in societal or organizational settings that tend to be risk averse and reluctant to adapt.

- **Change incurs loss**. Sometimes people do not resist change per se, but resist losing benefits (pay, status, amenities, etc.). that will no longer be available after the change.

- **Different understandings of the change proposed**. Some might simply not comprehend the changes that will be required, or the benefits that change will bring; they may also not understand what is required to change in the way proposed or their own role in the process. Differences of understanding may be due to language, experience, mindset, or lack of information; people sometimes also simply disagree about how change should happen.

- **The proposals are unsound**. People frequently have doubts about the quality of the advice provided to them. When they ask the adviser to justify her proposals, her answers may confirm their doubts. Resistance can reveal the blind spots and shortcomings of reforms, and help to correct the adviser's approach.

How can you respond to resistance in a manner that is effective?

How to work with resistance

Your first step: do not resist resistance. Work with it. This requires you to be clear about your attitude to resistance, your vision for change, the process you will follow, and the role you will take.[42] **How you deal with resistance depends very much on you, your mindset, and how you approach change processes**.

In this respect, advisers tend to adopt one of two mindsets when they encounter resistance:

1. **A fixed or defensive mindset.** Resistance is treated as the enemy of change. Those who resist become adversaries, and their resistance is an obstacle, a problem to be eliminated. Advisers may even feel that they are being rejected personally. Where this happens, the adviser is likely to be in defensive mode, is probably resisting the resistance, and may have taken one of the positions set out in the Drama Triangle (see Chapter 3). In either case, the adviser needs to leave this triggered and defensive state. The Drama and Growth triangle and the frameworks proposed in Chapter 6 on personal agency and interpersonal skills suggest strategies for overcoming defensiveness and acquiring the resources necessary to meet challenges with optimism and hope.

42. This chapter has been inspired by the work of Céline Bareil on resistance and the work of Carol Dweck on mindsets (see detailed references in the resource list).

2. **A growth mindset.** This mindset interprets resistance as an opportunity, a concern, or a preoccupation (a term coined by Céline Bareil). Resistance is a useful feedback mechanism that reveals discomfort in relation to the change initiative and therefore signals a need for special attention, thorough inquiry and deep listening. In a growth mindset, resistances are expected; they are starting points for learning and evolution.

To work with resistance in a positive manner, you need to adopt a growth mindset. Having done so, the next crucial step is to define the broader change approach.

> **"Don't resist the resistance."**
>
> Course participant

Adopting a broader change approach

Your approach to change will determine how you respond to resistance. If you have set a clearly defined goal, which you have confirmed is ready for implementation, resistance is likely to feel unsettling and upsetting. It will slow you down and disturb the plan you have designed. In contrast, if you consider that your proposal is open to challenge, and can be discussed, reviewed and improved, then, provided you have the necessary time and resources, you will regard resistance as an opportunity for dialogue, improvement, adaptation and adjustment to the real needs of your advisees.

We have already noted that adaptive approaches are more suitable for environments that are complex and unpredictable. Continuous improvement and feedback should practically be a requirement.

The way you understand and perceive your role will also be decisive. If you think your role is to solve problems and that the "right" way forward is the path set out in your plan, you will view your advisees as implementers. Their resistance will not be easy for you to digest. By contrast, if you think your role is to resource and accompany your counterparts in their change process, you will be able to adapt and respond positively to challenges they raise.

Guiding questions when you meet resistance

1. What specifically is being resisted?
2. Which stakeholders are involved?
3. At what level(s) is resistance occuring (at the individual, programme, organizational and/or system level)?
4. What are the causes of resistance?
5. Do all parties agree how to describe the causes and nature of resistance?
6. What room for manoeuvre do you have? How can you create more room?
7. How will you go about working with resistance constructively?
8. How adaptive is your broader change approach?
9. What questions do you need to ask in order to work with resistance?

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Key questions for the adviser

Begin by acknowledging that resistance is an opportunity to learn and grow for both the adviser and the advisee. Therefore, blockages need to be taken seriously and looked at carefully.

Once you have embraced a **growth mindset** and an **adaptive approach**, use the questions below to use resistance effectively, work with it, and become a guide and resource for your advisee.

- **Resistance to change**
  - How do you view resistance? Do you want to eliminate it? Or can you see it as an opportunity to be worked with to promote change?
  - How do you react when you encounter resistance? Are you defensive?
- **What do you resist?**
  - Have you asked what the resistance is about and where it occurs? Who is resisting what? What are its causes?
  - How can you work with resistance to create a better outcome?
- **Advisory role**
  - What is your role? Does it allow you to facilitate change?
  - Do you need to interpret your role differently, both to acquire a mandate to deal with the resistance you face and work with it constructively?
  - Are you drawn into behaviours of the Drama triangle? If so, how can you move towards a Growth position?

- **Personal agency / interpersonal relations**
    - Do you see yourself as part of the system or outside the system? How are you a part of the system?
    - What is your personal state? Are you in a positive state or a defensive state? Have you adopted an inquiring mindset? Are you aware of your feelings and needs when you face resistance? How can you put yourself in a positive, hopeful, and responsive state?
    - How well do you relate to your advisees? Do they trust you? Do you trust them? What factors influence your relationship? Have you investigated the feelings and needs of your advisees? What do they believe in? What fears do they have? What hopes do they have? What do they need to know to be comfortable with the proposed change?
    - What behavioural patterns can you observe in yourself and your advisees? Do you display Persecutor, Rescuer or Victim behaviours? What questions can you ask that might move you from negative to growth patterns?
    - What is your sphere of influence? What can you change? What is beyond your agency? Can you expand your sphere of influence? What would you need to do to expand your sphere of influence?

- **Adopting an attitude of inquiry; listening actively in complex contexts**
    - Do you apply complexity and systems thinking when you consider the resistance you face?
    - Have you interacted with and listened to your advisees? At what level? Are you in download mode? What would you need to do to build empathy and create a space in which co-creation becomes possible?
    - When you are in inquiry mode, what do you observe? What do you hear? What do you feel? What is missing? What else might be possible?
    - How much space is there for participation and co-creation? What is your mandate and role in this regard?

- **Colours of Change**
    - What proposals for change are resisted? What colour of change could help you to address the resistance?
        - Is it a blue issue (structure, detailed plan)?
        - Is it a yellow issue (power dynamics, negotiation)?
        - Is it a red issue (motivation, engagement and commitment)?
        - Is it a green issue (professional knowledge and learning)?
        - Is it a white issue (complexity, adaptability and self-steering)?
    - What colour are you most comfortable with? Is that colour helpful in relation to the resistance you face? What other colour(s) could help alleviate resistances?
    - If you have little experience of the colour, who can you invite to collaborate with you?

- **Reacting vs. responding**
  - When you consider the resistance you face, are you in a defensive or a reactive state?
  - What do you need to do to be able to respond mindfully to the challenges you face?
  - What would a win-win solution look like?
  - What do you need to be able to respond from a place of optimism, compassion and hope?

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Epilogue: effective advising

This Handbook has discussed some of the frameworks and tools that can help advisers who work in complex settings to be more effective, whether they are advising a national government, a local or (inter)national organization, or a specific sector or program.

How do we know whether we succeed? While there are no black and white benchmarks, because advisory assignments, relationships, disciplines, goals and contexts are so varied, we have learned a great deal about what makes an adviser effective. In addition to the core requirement of technical expertise, three key attributes of advisory effectiveness are the ability to **provide clarity** in complex environments, to **establish sound relationships**, and to **create positive working conditions**.

Advisers provide clarity. They:

- Position an assignment in relation to **larger socio-political contexts and ambitions** (for example, of the organization they advise) and take account of the specific setting.
- Propose **workable strategies** that will advance the broader objectives.
- Agree on **realistic change ambitions and action steps** with the advisee or client.
- Fulfil an **appropriate role** and propose appropriate roles for the advisee; negotiate clear, shared expectations with the advisee; and define the responsibilities of the advisee and the adviser.

Advisers build sound relationships and interactions. They:

- **Build trust and a good relationship with the advisee.** In doing so, they make themselves aware of their own and the advisee's explicit and implicit values, interests, feelings and needs.
- Take account of the capacities of the advisee and work to increase those capacities. It is particularly important to strengthen **sustainability, ownership and resilience.**
- Choose and apply **change styles and methods** that fit the setting and the change steps required. They are ready to adapt or switch styles and methods if required by the circumstances.
- Are aware of inclusion and exclusion mechanisms and propose and appropriately use and design **participatory approaches** to enhance ownership and leadership.
- **Meet resistance** with an open attitude and use it as a resource, to learn, address relational dynamics, and improve outcomes.

Advisers create positive working conditions. They:

- Draw on **people and resources** to meet the demands of their assignments.
- **Work with donors or their employers** to agree realistic ambitions and obtain appropriate support for their advisee.
- **Take care of themselves.** They are respectful of their own limitations and manage their wellbeing in work settings that are often challenging.

Overall, advising remains a journey of learning and adaptation. Every advisory assignment and role poses new and different challenges. Few of us perform effectively on all levels at all times.

We hope this guide will help you navigate your own journey.

Figure 27. Wordcloud featuring impressions, highlights and key takeaways from past course participants. Graphic by Interpeace.

About Interpeace

Interpeace is an international organization for peacebuilding. With over 25 years of experience, it has implemented a broad range of peacebuilding programmes in Africa, the Middle East, Asia, Europe, and Latin America.

Interpeace tailors its approach to each society and ensures that its work is locally designed and driven. Through local partners and its own local teams, it jointly develops peacebuilding programmes based on extensive consultation and research. Interpeace helps establish processes of change that promote sustainable peace, social cohesion, and resilience. The organization's work is designed to connect and promote understanding between local communities, civil society, governments, and the international community.

Interpeace also assists the international community – especially the United Nations – to play a more effective role in peacebuilding, based on Interpeace's expertise in field-based work at grassroots level. Interpeace achieves this primarily by contributing innovative thought leadership and fresh insights to contemporary peacebuilding policy. It also assists the international community through peace responsiveness work, in which Interpeace provides advice and practical support to other international organizations (especially those in the security, development, and humanitarian aid sectors), enabling them to adapt their work systemically to simultaneously address conflict dynamics and strengthen peace dynamics.

Interpeace is headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland, and has offices around the world.

The writing of this Handbook was made possible thanks to the generous financial contributions from:

Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
Confédération suisse
Confederazione Svizzera
Confederaziun svizra

Swiss Confederation

Canada

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This resource was developed for Interpeace's Training Course on Effective Advising in Complex Contexts: Enabling Sustainable Peace

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