

The Power in Our Hands

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We call conflicts which evolve around topics like goods, roles, space, power, time, and production, structural conflicts. For dealing with them, we need

- a) to understand the links, and,
- b) access to our own **power** and, thus, to the “lever of change”.

By using different forms of conflict analysis, we can recognise who is involved and what the conflict really is about.

Example: In an institution, repeated processes of exclusion happen. Someone is repeatedly bullied and eventually leaves the institution. Often, guilt is projected upon this person: “she is always late.” “He does not comply with hygiene regulations.” “She does not comply with instructions.” “He spreads a bad mood.” While these aspects may be true, they are not the cause of the exclusion. A conflict analysis quickly reveals that the leaders do not provide an adequate setting. They act arbitrarily and erratic, they manipulate, and exert pressure. This is a structural issue since it is an essential requirement for leadership to assume a role which provides the proper setting and enables the realisation of tasks. Leaders who ignore rules, create insecurity which, in turn, longs for redemption. One phantasy of redemption is exclusion: “If this one person leaves, everything will be OK.”

We cannot offer detailed conflict analysis in the virtual CAT training. We try a simpler model of analysis in which we invite you to reflect on your different roles. Based on your vision, you can explore who impedes what and how are you in your roles part of the conflict?

About roles: some roles are geared towards tasks. We call these formal roles. Examples of formal roles are head of department, facilitation, executive management, member etc. Apart from these task-oriented roles there are roles that, often unintentionally, are geared more towards the relationship. For example, the head of an institution can appear as “the buddy” or “the mum” or “dad”. There are many roles that are oriented towards the relationship. Well known roles in a conflict are the victim, the perpetrator, and the saviour.

Often, we ascribe different roles to different persons in a conflict which limits the possibilities of transforming a conflict. Just to give you one example: If we look at a conflict from the angle of the victim, perpetrator or saviour, conflicts quickly raise the question of guilt: “The perpetrator is guilty! No, the victim is! Or maybe it is the saviour’s fault?” This poses a dilemma. Whatever we do, with this understanding of roles, we remain powerless although we keep telling ourselves that we are proactive.

To really change something, we need a better comprehension of our own involvement in the conflict. If we want to understand this, we need to uncover our contribution, our responsibility in the conflict. This **responsibility** relates to our formal role, for example, as customer, citizen, parent or engineer. In our power space model (which is explained in the other sheet for this unit), taking over or having responsibility is one of the power vectors.

In the pilot group, we realised that many of us already have tasks in civil society that come with great responsibility. I am responsible as consultant, supervisor, instructor, speaker, lecturer, project manager, team member, board member, spouse, house owner, cyclist, passenger... If I take over responsibility, I hold creative power in my hands.

What do I hold in my hands? is a figurative question that came up during our pilot group. This is the first question relating to the aspect of responsibility in your vision. Maybe the question seems a bit simple to you. What do I hold in my hands? Let me give you an example: I am a cyclist. I am a road user and, firstly, I have to carry the burden of environmental pollution, and, secondly, I am visible on the road. Thus, I hold many things in my hands. I made myself a protective vest with an imprint: "Save the climate – cycle". I will make more vests and distribute them among cyclists. I can also initiate theme vests with the ADFC (German Cyclist Association). Or I can meet regularly with other cyclists to form a critical mass, in the mornings during rush hour, until a bike lane becomes available for cyclists. This is what I hold in my hands.



The second question relating to this aspect is: **How do I hold the responsibility in my hands?** With the Corona Crisis going on, I am required as a citizen to hold something in my hands that I don't want to hold. I am being told that keeping distance is the responsible means against structurally overstrained hospitals. This overstrain existed before the crisis. This is why I chose a health insurance which lobbied against the privatisation of hospitals. I would be very careful with imposing the responsibility of "keeping distance". Becoming active for a just health care system, on the other hand, is something I hold in my hands.

The second aspect in our power model is **trust**. What don't I hold in my hands? Some things I can't hold in my hands and I need others to hold it. This is the case with every campaign, including the CAT training. At the beginning, perhaps I hold something in my hands but then I need to let go. We took over responsibility for the first CAT groups but beyond that we have limited control on how the training develops. As for your vision, it is important to know what you do not hold in your hands. It makes many decisions easier. In civic work, I only hold fractions in my hands. Many inputs that we may give, develop their own dynamic. Some ideas fail, some expand. It's similar in private life. Raising children, I can control relatively few things compared to the things I hold in my hand.

The third aspect is **dialogue**. If you have read Paulo Freire's "The Pedagogy of the Oppressed" you may be familiar with his idea of dialogue. Here is just a small impulse. In Freire's view, dialogue has multiple facets. One aspect of dialogue is humility. We cannot control dialogue. Another facet is hope. We trust that something of the said will resonate with our counterpart. Dialogue cannot evolve without critical thinking, nor confrontation, nor the dilemmas that will come up.

Dialogue is the third vector in the power model. It adds another dimension to responsibility and trust. The question is: "**How, where, and when do I begin with a dialogue?**" How do I establish a dialogue with supposed opponents? Dialogue is not about being nice and benign. Even less, if we have to force our counterpart into dialogue. Here, the methods of nonviolent resistance come in. Thus, the third question: **What is your dialogue like regarding your current topic, and how do you want it to be?**

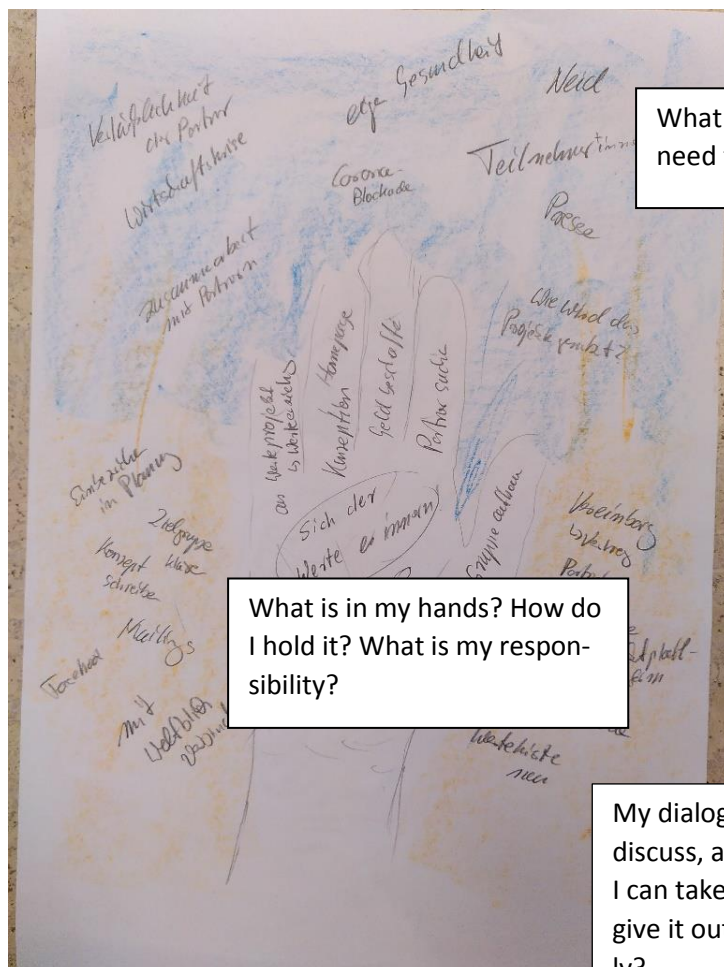
The task

Please do also read the second work sheet about power and powerlessness. Then we ask you to choose one issue of your vision. Now take a sheet of paper, put your hand on it, and draw the shape of your hand on the paper.

Think about the following questions:

- Which elements of your issue are already in your hands? Which other elements do you also want to hold? This is about concrete action. Write them within the shape of your hand. Try and feel how you keep this **responsibility**. You could use different colours. For example, red, if it is kept too close, yellow, if it is too loose, blue, if you keep it very carefully.
- In the area above the hand, add the aspects which you do not hold in your hand. They are not beyond your power! You can still check if and how they are being dealt with. However, it is not in your hands. This is about **trust**.
- Now, think about which levels of **dialogue** do already exist regarding your issue? Which forms of dialogue do you still need? How do you want to achieve them? Please write this down in the area below your hand.

Now, look at your picture. How do you feel about this? With this feeling you start into the next meeting.



What is not in my hands? What do I need trust for? How can I test trust?

What is in my hands? How do I hold it? What is my responsibility?

My dialogue: What do I need to discuss, and how can I do it so that I can take on responsibility and give it out of my hands confidently?