INCORE

The Evaluation of
Conflict Resolution Interventions

PART II:
EMERGING
PRACTICE & THEORY

UNIVERSITY of ULSTER

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INCORE

Conflicts of an ethnic, religious, political and cultural nature continue to dominate the world's attention. Since 1990, over 150 wars have taken place, most of which are recurrent, protracted and intra-state, and there is little evidence that such conflicts will decrease significantly over the coming decades. Ninety percent of our states are now multi-identity states and most governments are having difficulty dealing positively with such diversity.

Addressing the causes, effects, solutions and post-settlement impacts of such wars has been the role of the UNU Institute for Conflict Research at the University of Ulster (INCORE) since it was established in 1993. INCORE is a joint research institute of the United Nations University and the University of Ulster. It seeks to address the management and resolution of contemporary conflicts through research, training, practice, policy and theory. INCORE's vision is of a world where the knowledge and skills exist to make non-military management of ethno-political conflict the norm.

The Research Unit undertakes, commissions and supervises research of a multidisciplinary nature, particularly on post-settlement issues, governance and diversity, and research methodology in violent societies. The *Policy and Evaluation Unit* is committed to bridging the gaps between theory, practice and policy. It seeks to ensure that conflict-related research and practice is incorporated into grassroots programming and governmental policy.

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PREFACE

This paper is the result of the second phase of the UNU/INCORE[1] research project on the evaluation of conflict resolution interventions. The first phase sought to identify the current perceptions, attitudes and practices regarding evaluation held within the conflict resolution practitioner, funder and evaluator communities. It resulted in a publication, The Evaluation of Conflict Resolution Interventions: Framing the State of Play, *which provides readers with information about current practices in the field and a possible framework regarding the different uses of evaluation from a learning perspective.[2] Additionally, it summarises the major questions and challenges facing those involved in this work and offers guides to resources on a variety of topics related to conflict resolution evaluation (CRE).*

Phase Two of this project saw a meeting convened of 24 individuals from around the world who are actively engaged with issues related to conflict resolution and evaluation (see Appendix 2 for full participant list). Held in Northern Ireland, July 4-5, 2002 this meeting/workshop sought to advance the discussion around a number of the questions and challenges raised during the original research. Throughout the two days of intensive discussions four themes were identified as crosscutting through a number of these questions and challenges. This paper not only captures the essence of the discussion around these emerging themes but also aims to further develop the issues through research and analysis.

The two publications resulting from this project are complimentary in nature but are intended to stand alone. Whereas the first publication offers a comprehensive presentation of the current activity in CRE, this piece narrows its focus to themes that emerged from the discussions of the questions and challenges in this area. Reading part one will give the reader a broader understanding of CRE but is not a prerequisite to understanding this work.

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[1] The United Nations University's International Conflict Research Centre at the University of Ulster (UNU/INCORE) seeks to address the causes, effects, solutions and post-settlement impacts of violent conflict. Further information may be found at www.incore.ulst.ac.uk.

[2] This document may be ordered from INCORE or is available on-line at http://www.incore.ulst.ac.uk/home/policy/projectsumm.htm

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Evaluation has the potential to contribute to learning and to improve the conflict resolution projects that are implemented in the field. Yet, many of the evaluation approaches that are currently in use cannot be adapted for implementation in conflict resolution (CR) environments, where the context is constantly changing and the time-frame for results can extend over years or even generations. Furthermore, the fear exists that evaluation may expose the fact that conflict resolution might not achieve the results that have popularly been attributed to its work.

However, despite the challenges, valuable information can be gained through the evaluation process. This paper seeks to summarise thinking on a number of the challenges that have been encountered by conflict resolution evaluators in the hopes of enhancing evaluation practice and therefore its potential contribution to this field.

Emerging Practice

As evaluations of conflict resolution projects become more common, those who are actively engaged in this work highlighted two areas for consideration - the evaluator and politics. Each of these areas is broken down into a number of issues:

The Evaluator

Roles of the CR Evaluator: A CR evaluator can take on different roles depending on the goal or purpose of the evaluation. A typology of roles - the 'operative', the 'consultant' and the 'learning facilitator' - provide a continuum of responsibilities for the evaluator.

Level of Engagement: There is also a spectrum of engagement between the evaluator and the project. At one end is the external evaluator with no previous interaction with the project. At the other end is self-evaluation, conducted by people internal to the project. In the middle is a range of options with a compromise between these extremes.

Ethical Responsibilities: An evaluator has the responsibility both to do no harm and to examine whether the evaluation itself is ethically responsible. Developing a code of conduct for CR evaluators is one possible way in which this challenge could be addressed.

Politics

Politics of Selection: Decisions about factors such as when the evaluation is undertaken, the duration of the evaluation, the questions to be answered and the type of feedback process, can be politically motivated. This can affect the credibility and value of the evaluation's findings. However, in some circumstances, these decisions are made out of expediency or ignorance, rather than political motives. In such cases, awareness of this challenge is a useful tool for mitigation.

Politics of Dissemination: The issue of who owns the evaluation and who determines its distribution can affect the information that is provided through the process. These factors have the potential to impact on future programming, funding and policy decisions.

Emerging Theory

Through discussion with experienced evaluators, practitioners and funders, two gaps in the theoretical understanding of conflict resolution emerged. Exploring these gaps is not only important to evaluation but also critical to the development of the field as a whole.

Micro-Macro Connection

An important issue for the field to address is if, and if so, how, change is effected beyond the direct participants in a project. By examining 'whom' the project seeks to change or influence as a base, it becomes possible to determine whether other tiers (whether individual, community, society or nation) are also influenced through the work. By developing a better understanding of what information is transferred and how, the field can develop more effective and targeted programmes.

Evaluating the Ideas that Underpin our Actions

Many of the theories and assumptions that underlie conflict resolution work are not articulated or explored in the evaluation process. Yet, incorporating this aspect into evaluation could help determine whether project underachievement is due to poor implementation or conceptual inaccuracies in the project design. In order to assist with this process, definitions of key concepts were clarified:

Theories of Conflict determine the origin(s) or cause(s) of conflict.

Theories of Conflict Resolution consider what needs to happen to bring about the resolution of a conflict and therefore set the overarching goal of what one is trying to achieve (e.g. equality, diversity).

Theories of Practice establish a method or strategy for addressing a conflict.

Theories of Change are generalised beliefs about how and why widespread change can be generated in a violent conflict.

Working Assumptions about Change refer to specific assumptions made at the level of project design and implementation about the transformative effect of each discrete action/activity.

To understand how these different concepts interrelate, see Diagram 8 on page 37. Theory-based evaluation, which explores how and why an initiative works, provides a possible starting point for future evaluations of working assumptions and theories of change.

Sufficient experience has now been acquired in conflict resolution to allow the field to become more critical of how interventions are conducted and more sophisticated in analysing their effects. However, the information gathered through the evaluation process is often under-utilised and overly simplistic. By considering more of the factors that influence the project and its evaluation, it is hoped that better evaluations will be produced that contribute to an improvement in both practice and theory.

INTRODUCTION

When conducted effectively, evaluation can be an essential ingredient to learning and therefore to improvements in the conflict resolution[1] field. It has the potential to enhance the programmatic[2] work that is being done at the field level, increase funder confidence about what their investment is accomplishing, and reduce public and government scepticism about the impact of conflict resolution work (Ross, 2001). However, as a field, conflict resolution (CR) tends both to fear and to avoid evaluation.

Currently, conflict resolution evaluation (CRE) is an *ad hoc* process that conforms to the needs of the moment and is limited by a lack of skills, understanding and resources. CRE is often based on generic evaluation approaches that do not meet many of the unique needs of this field. Approaches that assume a project will be conducted in a static environment with a set start and end point cannot be adapted for conflict resolution interventions[3] which operate in a situation where the context is constantly changing and where the desired impacts[4] may not occur for years or even generations. Additionally, there is never a single interpretation of events in a conflict situation - rather multiple realities exist simultaneously for different actors and parties. A snapshot of one moment in the project misses the many dimensions in which the work is being carried out and many of the subtleties that are central to peace work (Bush, K., Meeting Discussion, 2002). By their very nature, conflict resolution interventions try to effect changes in intangible areas such as perceptions, trust, attitudes, levels of cooperation and relationships. Thus, some of the key challenges for conflict resolution

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[1] The use of the phrase 'conflict resolution' is not meant to refer to a particular theory or ideological preference. Rather it is a general term to encompass a variety of activities and approaches to resolving disputes and transforming conflict.

[2] Project, programme and intervention will be used interchangeably in this paper to refer to all conflict resolution work undertaken in the field.

[3] The phrase 'conflict resolution intervention' is a general term referring to all initiatives developed to build peace, address the root causes of conflict, improve human security, increase recognition of human rights, bring equality, promote diversity or build new sustainable political institutions.

[4] An 'impact' is the positive or negative consequence of the outcomes of an intervention (either intended or unintended).

evaluations are to find ways to measure these changes, to test the sustainability[5] of the change and to ascertain its effect on the overall peace process. The approaches used to date have had very limited success in responding to these problems.

Most conflict resolution practitioners are convinced that the work in which they are engaged is both useful and productive - an assessment often based on their own interactions and perceptions rather than on quantifiable data or qualitative research results. Evaluation is resisted because it has the potential to uncover ineffective work and/or explode myths central to the belief systems of the field. If comprehensive evaluations were to show that some of the activities undertaken in the past fifty years under the mantle of conflict resolution did not in fact lead to the anticipated ends, it could potentially undermine the credibility of the entire field. Without evaluation, however, the field loses the opportunity to benefit from a learning process that would contribute to the improvement of practice.

What constitutes successful achievement of conflict resolution goals, however, needs to be further explored and articulated by the field. The aims of many projects are abstract - such as 'improving inter-community relations' or 'creating a peaceful atmosphere' - and to be made useful these statements need to be translated into concrete and measurable accomplishments. At a theoretical level, the field needs to consider whether a project should be deemed 'successful' if it has accomplished the activities laid out at the beginning of the intervention or whether the notion of success should also include a contribution to peace writ-large[6]. Even in cases where good work is being done, individual projects are unlikely to be able to live up to idealistic images of directly contributing to the achievement of overall peace. Partial successes are often important and the field needs to appreciate how they matter and move a conflict in the right direction. If the bar of expectations is set too high, evaluation will highlight what has not been achieved rather than what has (Ross, M., Meeting Discussion, 2002).

Despite these limitations, evaluations of conflict resolution interventions continue to be conducted for a variety of reasons. Practitioners primarily tend to undertake evaluations to fulfil grant requirements set by funders, as well as

to learn about what did and did not work so as to improve their practice. Conversely, funders are principally motivated by a need to ensure that their own agency goals are being met by reviewing the funding allocations they have made. These differing motivations can cause frustration when they are not communicated amongst parties involved and the end results of the evaluation only serve the needs of one actor (Church and Shouldice, 2002).

Discussions about differing motivations, expected outcomes and relationships in the evaluation process often lead to an examination of the role of power in relationships between stakeholders - practitioners, evaluators, funders and project participants/beneficiaries. The conflict resolution field is uncomfortable with the concept of 'power' and tends to reject realist power-based notions of analysis, instead approaching issues from a collaborative and cooperative perspective. This discomfort provokes resistance to engaging deeply in dialogue about, and implementation of, evaluation because such engagement would require addressing issues of power directly (Hoffman, M., Meeting Discussion, 2002).

Despite the aforementioned challenges, useful information can be gleaned through the evaluation process in many cases. However, this learning is rarely internalised in the organisation or disseminated within the field. The evaluation processes have traditionally had few opportunities to feedback and interactively share the reflections of the evaluator with practitioners. Moreover, few practitioners have the time and space to consider the comments and recommendations emerging from the evaluations (Gormley-Heenan, C., Meeting Discussion, 2002). Competitiveness between conflict resolution agencies, particularly for funding, has also decreased the motivation to share lessons about practice (Church, M., Meeting Discussion, 2002). Finally, even if individual projects or practitioners have the opportunity to learn from the evaluations in which they participate, this information needs to be translated into policy if it is to be institutionalised.

This paper is the second publication resulting from a research project to explore evaluation and conflict resolution interventions. The first paper[7] aimed to identify and summarise the state of evaluation within three communities in this field; practitioners, funders and evaluators. In the process, it raised a series of

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[5] 'Sustainability' refers to the durability of an intervention's results after it has concluded.

[6] 'Peace writ-large' is a concept borrowed from the Reflecting on Peace Practice Project (www.cdainc.com/rpp) that refers to 'peace in the big picture' or the overall situation in the country.

[7] Church, C. and Shouldice, J. (2002). *The Evaluation of Conflict Resolution Interventions: Framing the State of Play*. Derry/Londonderry: INCORE. (ISBN: 0 9549 4061 9 or available online at http://www.incore.ulst.ac.uk/home/policy/projectsumm.htm)

questions and challenges that warranted further investigation and discussion. To this end the second phase of the project convened a meeting of twenty-four individuals engaged in these issues. During this meeting four issues emerged that were cross-cutting to a number of the questions and challenges.

This paper seeks to summarise and advance the thinking on these nascent themes. The discussion of themes, digested from a spectrum of experiences of individuals who are actively engaged in CRE, does not merely summarise the meeting dialogues, however, but also incorporates independent research and analysis. The themes include both emerging practice for conducting evaluations, and theoretical gaps and questions that the field of conflict resolution needs to address in order to advance. Although the gaps in theory are not necessarily areas commonly under consideration when conducting an evaluation, advancements in such thinking would significantly improve an evaluation's capacity to accurately assess the outcomes[8] and impacts of programmes. In turn, this would provide substantial benefit to the field as a whole.

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8 An 'outcome' is the short-term change that results from an intervention's activities.

EMERGING PRACTICE IN THE EVALUATION OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION INTERVENTIONS

As the evaluation of interventions gradually becomes more common, a body of expertise will develop that can feed into and improve the evaluation process' ability to handle the nuances of conflict programmes. A nascent pool of information is already beginning to develop, as was evidenced in the 2002 meeting in Northern Ireland. Two main areas for consideration emerged: the way an evaluator interacts with stakeholders and the politics surrounding the evaluation process.

Emerging Practice: Roles, Relationships & Ethics

The interaction between the evaluator and the stakeholders encompasses three issue areas. First is a discussion of the different roles that a CR evaluator can play. Second is a reflection on the varying levels of engagement that an evaluator can have with a project while still maintaining credibility. Both of these issues illustrate a tension between detached and participatory stances. Finally, there is a consideration of the ethical responsibilities inherent to conducting evaluations. By documenting and disseminating the learning of the participants from the Northern Ireland meeting, it is hoped that others involved in conflict resolution evaluation will benefit from their experience.

I. Emerging Roles of the CR Evaluator

Mirroring advancements made in general evaluation several years ago (Weiss, 1998), a diversity of roles for the conflict resolution evaluator is becoming evident. The function an evaluator plays in the process is primarily dependent on the goal or purpose of the evaluation. However, there are a number of other factors that influence this decision such as the parameters set by the evaluation commissioner, the time and money available for the evaluation, the scope of the evaluation and the source of the funds. These aspects contribute to the determination of who the most appropriate evaluator would be.

Emerging practice suggests that there are three different roles an evaluator can adopt: operative, consultant and learning facilitator. The roles are presented here as a typology in order to illustrate the spectrum of options. This typology should not be interpreted as a hierarchy of choices, as each of these roles is useful in different situations. As can be seen in the Function column of Diagram 1, each role builds upon or adds to the previous. It is important for stakeholders not only to be aware that evaluators' functions can differ but also to take the time to determine which role is best suited for the type of evaluation to be performed and to set the parameters of the evaluation accordingly. Careful selection of the role that the evaluator is to play will help to define the results expected through the evaluation, which, in turn, leads to fewer misunderstandings and frustrations about motives and expectations between participating stakeholders.

Diagram 1: Roles of Evaluators

	Function	Commonly Instigated	Stakeholder Involvement	Output
Operative	Describe project Conduct logical analysis Assess objective achievement	Project conclusion	Primarily controlled by evaluator who convenes relevant stakeholders	Assessment Report
Consultant	All of the above + Expand survey to include unintended and negative impacts Establish means to 'use' evaluation results	End of pilot project or end of new phase in established project	Led by evaluator Joint process for establishing usefulness and learning	Assessment Report Feedback Workshops at end of the process
Learning Facilitator	All of the above + Actively engage in driving project development Attempt to link project learning into the larger organisation	Beginning of the project Runs throughout	Evaluator facilitates stakeholders All actors empowered to engage with the process	Assessment Report Feedback workshops throughout process Future Recommendations Establishment of Learning System

The first role - the 'operative' - sees the evaluators engaging in conventional evaluation activities. Their role is to describe the project, provide a logical analysis of what has occurred and assess the achievement of project objectives. The operative would usually be brought in at the end of a project (e.g. after a cycle of funding has ended). This type of evaluator would ensure that the project conformed to agreed parameters and that it was progressing as all stakeholders had anticipated. They would produce a report containing a description of the project and their analysis as to its achievement of success.

The second role, which has a slightly broader remit, is that of 'consultant'. Consultants would complete the same data collection as the operative but would expand their information gathering to include unintended positive and negative impacts. The primary distinction between these roles is that the consultant would also actively assist practitioners and funders with the learning process through efforts such as developing recommendations for improving the project and setting up feedback seminars to discuss their findings. This type of evaluation would be most useful for projects in a pilot or test phase, or for established projects that are elaborating new hypotheses or new practices in their work. It could also be useful in situations where practitioners want to ensure that they are using the appropriate methods and approaches to reach their desired ends. It provides both a broader exploration of the effects that the project is having within its context and an opportunity for stakeholders to revisit the findings and learn from the work.

Finally, an evaluator who engages throughout the duration of a project is the 'learning facilitator'. As before, this type of evaluator is involved in the collection of data about both intended and unintended project outcomes and impacts. However, the learning facilitator also actively drives the development of the project - and potentially the organisation. This type of evaluator would help the stakeholders to reflect on the project throughout its implementation and would assist in the determination of future actions. Learning facilitators may also be involved in the creation of plans that will push the agency forward and in developing integrated learning processes for the future.

Evaluations vary in their quality and rigour, regardless of the type of evaluator selected (Spencer, 1997; Church and Shouldice, 2002). There are no standards of good practice for such things as the scope of information to be included or frequency and quality of interaction with the project under review. This makes comparison between evaluation results unreliable and can undermine the credibility of claims of effectiveness. Similarly, there are no standards set for

the skills and knowledge needed to undertake a CR evaluation. Anecdotal evidence indicates that it is rare to find an evaluator with both evaluation methods training and conflict resolution experience. Some evaluators have received training in general evaluation methodology and some have experience working in conflict but neither are necessary criteria when undertaking a CR evaluation. Although applicable to all the roles described, conflict-specific training is of particular relevance to the consultant and learning facilitator functions. Providing recommendations for improving the project under review or suggesting ways forward for the organisation require the evaluator to have the skills and competence commensurate with such a responsibility (Church, M., Meeting Discussion, 2002). To ensure a high quality evaluation that will be useful to those engaged in conflict resolution work, the field needs to encourage training in CR-specific evaluation and find methods to recognise qualified evaluators.

II. The Evaluator – Project Relationship: Levels of Engagement

Although popular perception holds that the only credible evaluator is an external evaluator (Church and Shouldice, 2002), other levels of engagement are now being explored in conflict resolution work. The differing degrees of engagement between the evaluator and the project can be conceptualised as a spectrum, ranging from external evaluation to self-evaluation, as depicted in Diagram 2.

Diagram 2: Spectrum of Evaluator Engagement

| External Evaluator: Evaluator with no previous knowledge or involvement in the project or organisation | "Family-doctor" evaluator: External professional but not detached | Mixed evaluation team: Internal and external representatives | Self-evaluation |
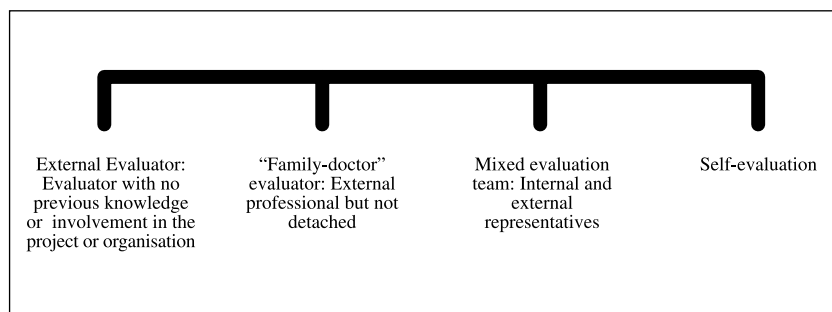
Located at one end of the spectrum, the external evaluator has no previous knowledge or prior interaction with the project or organisation. One of the common driving forces behind commissioning an external evaluator is the perception that only someone unbiased, neutral and removed from the project can evaluate it objectively and transparently. However, experience in conflict resolution work has shown that utilising an evaluator who is completely ignorant of many aspects of the project can be detrimental.

There are several ways in which an external evaluator may not be the most appropriate for this type of intervention. Evaluators who are parachuted into a conflict situation where a CR project is taking place may miss important factors related to local culture and customs (Abdalla, A., Church, M., Large, J., Meeting Discussions, 2002). Moreover, it is difficult for the evaluator to understand what success has been achieved from a contextually sensitive perspective, without considering the environment in which the project is operating (Makalima, B., Meeting Discussion, 2002). Finally, any information gained during the evaluation that is not codified in their final report will be lost, including decisions about the execution of the evaluation and the weighting of factors under consideration (Parker, S., Meeting Discussion, 2002).

What happens to the credibility of the evaluator, however, if they develop an ongoing relationship with the project and the organisation? Do they lose their ability to provide neutral and unbiased assessment? Perhaps a more pertinent question to consider is the degree of importance placed on neutrality or even perceived neutrality. Some argue that an evaluator need not necessarily be unaware of the project or uninterested in its outcomes to be fair in assessing it (Austin, A., Meeting Discussion, 2002). As one evaluator explains, she can simultaneously be both 'part and apart' of the project. That is, she can be interested and engaged in what the project or organisation seeks to accomplish yet still able to evaluate the project from a detached perspective (Church, M., Meeting Discussion, 2002). One possible way to perceive this type of interaction is to compare the evaluator with a family doctor. Just like the doctor, the evaluator is expected to be professional, yet not neutral or detached from the best interests of the project. The evaluator would engage with a project over time and build up an awareness of its history and issues of concern. This would then allow for a more comprehensive and contextually relevant evaluation (Abdalla, A., Meeting Discussion, 2002). This depiction of a family doctor type of relationship moves one toward the middle of the spectrum.

Further along the spectrum, one finds a 'mixed' evaluation team made up of representatives external and internal to the organisation. This team could provide a compromise that satisfies the need for some people who are external to the project and others who maintain an ongoing attention to its development.

This balance would offer both perspectives - an external, neutral and unbiased reflection that meets concerns about accountability and transparency, coupled with an internal understanding of the contextual evolution of the project - providing a more multidimensional assessment.

This 'mixed' team approach is currently being implementing by a few pioneering agencies. One agency has implemented an evaluation structure whereby a staff member, who is not directly involved with the project but is still an employee of the implementing organisation, is included on the evaluation team. That individual is able to contribute useful background knowledge that the evaluation team needs to make its assessment and provides long-term continuity in the evaluation process. Additionally, the staff member receives a plethora of information - that can be fed back into the organisation - about the findings from the evaluation itself, as well as about considerations for structuring future projects and evaluation processes (Makalima, B., Meeting Discussion, 2002).

If participation on an evaluation team can provide a learning experience for practitioners, one might extrapolate that this could also be the case for funders - particularly desk officers. The opportunity to engage in an evaluation process would improve the feedback mechanism from field to funder and provide a different perspective on project goals and successes. Participating stakeholders would be furnished with a better comprehension of the evaluation process in general, which could in turn improve planning and implementation processes. Furthermore, funder involvement could help bridge the communication gap between funders and practitioners. While the authors acknowledge the resource implications in terms of time and finances, as well as the internal strategic planning that would be required for stakeholders to be included in some evaluation teams, the benefits to the field would be substantial.

At the other end of the spectrum is self-evaluation, whereby the people engaged in the implementation of the project conduct the assessment. This approach can be advantageous when resources, particularly money, are not available. Although not necessarily recognised as such, many elements of self-evaluation are currently used throughout the conflict resolution field as part of the monitoring process. Self-reports provide funders with regular updates on how a project is progressing, the challenges it has encountered and next steps for the project. Such reports could be expanded in both breadth and depth; responsibility for evaluation would then be placed directly with the stakeholders involved in the project.

However, two challenges would need to be addressed if this option were to be considered legitimate. First, self-reports may be overly optimistic about project achievements if their goal is to ensure continued funding rather than contributing to the body of knowledge of the field (Merson, B., Meeting Discussion, 2002). For self-evaluation to be effective, funders and practitioners alike would have to accept the importance of openness and not fear the results of their honesty. Second, the field would need to be prepared to accept the credibility of comments and reflections made by people internal to a conflict resolution programme. This would need to be considered a legitimate approach to evaluation rather than a lesser alternative to be used when no better options are available.

III. Ethical Responsibilities of the CR Evaluator

When choosing to engage in an evaluation, it was generally agreed that the evaluator accepts certain ethical responsibilities to all stakeholders involved with the project and to the integrity of the evaluation. Two aspects of this dominated the discussions at the Northern Ireland meeting. A first consideration is that the evaluators have a responsibility to 'do no harm' through their work (Large, J., Ross, M., Meeting Discussion, 2002). Although this phrase is borrowed from Anderson's work in the development and aid field, evaluations, just like the projects they study, must also be designed with care.

Evaluators need to consider the ramifications of their actions at both the individual and societal level. At the individual level, evaluators need to think about the impact of their work on local people, particularly the participants in the project. This is best expanded upon through an illustration. For some victims of violent conflict, silence can be a coping strategy. However, as part of the evaluation process they may be asked to talk about their experiences. The evaluation process therefore risks undermining the participants' coping strategy without offering the necessary support structure to provide assistance if it is needed (Goodhand, J., Meeting Discussion, 2002).

At the societal level, evaluation can potentially have an impact on the conflict in which the project is operating. For example, an evaluator enters a tense conflict situation to evaluate a cross-community dialogue project with leaders of opposing communities. The evaluator is permitted to meet with the participants in the programme because of the goodwill and trust established between the conflicting parties and the implementing agency. However, if the

evaluator does not operate within the norms of communication established by the agency (such as meeting with an equal number of representatives from each side) or is interpreted as being biased by one of the parties, this can severely damage the agency's credibility with the parties and constrain the dialogue process.

The second aspect discussed was the tension arising from determining whether an evaluator can still responsibly be involved in evaluations that have been framed in an unethical way. The decision of what constitutes an ethically responsible evaluation is, at the moment, determined by the individual evaluator. Considerations could include the exclusion of certain parties, groups or participants from the process, evaluation expectations that are unrealistic given the resources provided, or terms of reference set out in such a way that the outcome of the evaluation is predetermined.

In response to these ethical responsibilities, a number of people engaged in conflict resolution evaluation (Brusset, E., Clements, K., McKimm, C., Meeting Discussion, 2002) have suggested establishing a code of conduct for CR evaluators. Such a code could clarify many of the responsibilities of the evaluator. There is a range of issues that could constitute part of a code, such as the qualifications or skills the evaluator should possess; the expectation of integrity and honesty in completing a fair and unbiased evaluation; accountability to stakeholders involved in the project under review; particular respect and protection for project participants; and fiscal responsibility in the evaluation process. Although such codes exist for generic evaluators,[9] the authors propose that the challenges of working in conflict merit a separate code to reflect the practical and ethical complexities of the work.

Naturally, many questions arise about who would write such a code and how it might be used. A pre-existing network or umbrella organisation would be well placed to develop such a code and establish an international association of CR evaluators. The process of joining the association could be as loose or as structured as desired by the field - from prescribing minimum qualifications for CR evaluators, to requiring only an acceptance of the guiding principles of the code of conduct.

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[9] See, for example, the Canadian Evaluation Society's Guidelines for Ethical Conduct. The document is available on their website at http://evaluationcanada.ca

Emerging Practice: Politics - The Invisible Hand?

It is commonly recognised that there are inter-organisational politics operating on the ground and between practitioners and funders. However, there is also significant politics within the evaluation process. Stakeholders can manipulate factors in the evaluation to achieve certain ends, such as the illustration of the positive or negative impacts of a policy decision; the continuation or cessation of a project; or the encouragement or discouragement of continued investment in a particular issue or region. As illustrated by these examples, the term politics in this context refers to the manipulation of the interplay of actors and forces, with the implication that there is an attempt to alter the outcome of the activity. Commonly referred to as power-politics or power-dynamics, when negatively inspired, it can have a series of consequences, such as impeding the neutral perception of evaluation and therefore decreasing its credibility, increasing distrust between stakeholders and eroding funder-practitioner relationships. Those engaging in the process need, therefore, to recognise the potential for politics to play a role so they can take mitigating action where possible. This applies particularly to the evaluator, who, as stated previously, has an ethical responsibility to be a neutral agent in the process. While recognising the relevance of the negative effect of politics between organisations, this paper focuses on two areas specific to evaluation in which politics can be influential.

I. The Politics of Selection

All aspects of the evaluation process are subject to some form of selection, including (but not limited to) who to hire, what indicators to select, who to talk with and what information to include in the final report. When done transparently, these issues are rarely a matter for consideration. However, when the political hand becomes involved, the value of the evaluation process can be nullified or the results discredited. Opportunities to make politically motivated choices are available to funders, practitioners and evaluators alike and can occur in both the planning and implementation phases of the evaluation process.

At the planning level, by setting the terms of reference, the evaluation commissioner makes significant choices about how the evaluation is structured, which can affect its outcome (Goodhand, J., Meeting Discussion, 2002).

Developing the terms of reference can include such decisions as:

- When the evaluation is undertaken;

- The required skills and experience of the evaluator or evaluation team and their subsequent selection;

- The duration of the evaluation;

- The perspective from which the project will be evaluated;

- The questions the evaluation seeks to answer;

- What type of feedback or reporting process will be used;

- The financial resources available.

The first example - when the evaluation is undertaken - offers a good illustration of the potential for politics to have a negative impact on the process. If, for instance, the commissioner of an evaluation seeks to terminate funding for a project and needs to show that the work is not having its intended effect in order to do so, he/she can initiate an evaluation during a turbulent time when external factors are likely to have an impact on the evaluation findings. Elections, breaking of cease-fires, or symbolic days of celebration could all throw project participants into a sudden strident viewpoint that could discount the positive changes a project may have effected. Although this is perhaps an oversimplified example, the potential for politics to play a role is clear.

The importance of the perspective from which a project is evaluated can also be easily illustrated through an example. When an evaluator reviews a project such as a women's peace centre, many different elements of the work could alter the focus of the evaluation. If the commissioner of the evaluation is predominantly interested in development work, the focus might be on what skills the women had gained and what type of economic supports the centre had provided. This would differ significantly from a funder focused on post-conflict peacebuilding. Such a funder might place a greater emphasis on whether cross-community ties had been established among women of different backgrounds. This can become a political issue when, for instance, a practitioner or agency is seeking funding from a particular funder or thematic programming area. If funds are available in one area - such as peacebuilding - an evaluator may be chosen who will emphasise whichever aspect of the work will appeal to the funder most.

The politics of selection can also be found in the implementation phase of an evaluation. Practitioners are able to exercise some influence over which staff members and project participants the evaluator speaks with, and thus whose stories are heard. This has the potential to be subject to political motives related to what the practitioner wants the evaluator to hear. For example, the evaluator could end up only speaking with participants who enjoyed the project and want it to continue - leading the evaluator to conclude that additional funding should be allocated to the implementing agency.

The evaluator also needs to be considered within the discussion on the politics of selection. Evaluators, as the main conduit of information between the project and the commissioner, act as a filter through which only some of the vast amount of information they receive is delivered (Langlois, T., Meeting Discussion, 2002). They are therefore in a position to determine what information is included and what is omitted, particularly in the final evaluation report. This can have particularly severe consequences when the evaluator takes on the role of a learning facilitator and makes recommendations as part of the evaluation. He/she has the potential to substantially influence the future direction of the project or organisation under review.

Although all engaged in the evaluation process should be aware of the negative impact politics can have, upon reflection it appears that these decisions may not always be negatively premeditated. Rather, they may be the result of ignorance or opting for what appears to be the easiest option. A desk officer in a government department, for example, may have fifty projects that need to be evaluated. For ease of coordination, the decision could be taken to commission all of the evaluations in July to allow enough time to analyse the results before the end of the fiscal year. However, for projects in Northern Ireland, July is often a time of heightened political tension and can be a period of greater violent conflict. As a result, these evaluations may not capture the full extent of change instigated because the political environment often overwhelms all aspects of people's lives. This example provides an illustration of a decision that could either be interpreted politically or simply as the result of the easiest route for the commissioner of the evaluation who has work goals and targets to achieve.

This process of taking decisions out of expediency or ignorance can also affect the practitioner. For example, when the evaluator arrives and asks to speak with participants from the intervention under review, the practitioner is most likely to arrange for the evaluator to speak with people who are easily

accessible and who are willing to participate. These people are also likely to have been the ones who were pleased with the work. Decisions related to timing, location and selection of interviewees, while seeming innocuous, can greatly affect who is able to talk to the evaluator, what information is gathered and how these results will then compare to previously collected data. Although the selection of the interviewees may have been based on efficiency, it has the potential to create a skewed impression of the project.

One possible route for mitigating many of these problems is to work on developing a better relationship between the funder and the practitioner. Although improving communication is an important aspect, all parties must also alter the lens through which information is processed. Currently, evaluation is often interpreted by practitioners as a judgement of their work. This tends to create suspicion and unease about the evaluation process. From this perspective, the practitioner is less likely to make suggestions or to discuss options for the evaluation with the funder. Conversely, the funder is aware that the outcome of the evaluation is likely to affect further funding allocations for the practitioner, so tends to be suspicious of the practitioner's desire to show the project in the best light.

Some evaluators are now asking all stakeholders to sit down together before the terms of reference are finalised to provide an opportunity for raising any concerns about timing, bias or methodology. This forum limits avoidable mistakes and improves the degree to which the evaluation is tailored to meet the specific needs and context of a particular project. Not only does this encourage all of the stakeholders to invest in the evaluation process, it also helps to ensure that the evaluation is useful and well directed.

II. Politics of Dissemination

A discussion about the politics of dissemination embraces two issues: ownership and distribution. Beginning with the latter, knowledge of who the information will be shared with can affect the information the evaluator is provided with during the evaluation process (Birkoff, J., Meeting Discussion, 2002). For example, if practitioners know that the information given to the evaluator will remain confidential they may be more willing to discuss certain aspects of their practice than if all of the data collected will be given directly to the funder or made available to the public. For this reason, a number of evaluators have begun to consider it within their ethical responsibilities to determine at the outset of the process who will own the final product of their

work and to ensure that all participants in the evaluation process are made aware of the implications (Makalima, B., Meeting Discussion, 2002).

In addition, depending on how it is disseminated, the completed evaluation report has the potential to impact on future programming and organisation policy decisions. If the final report of an evaluation, for example, confirms that a programme is exceeding expectations, the funder is likely to want to make that report prominent. Conversely, if the report shows that the programme has done good work but is below publicly stated expectations, the report may not be shared with the same vigour. This is a standard practice, to be expected in most situations. However, the potential for political motivations to have an influence occurs when, for example, a funder chooses to stop funding a particular organisation even though the last evaluation report shows that it has been doing excellent work. In this case, the funder could choose not to release the report because of its potential to contradict the decision taken. Alternatively, widely circulating a report that illustrates low performance can serve to stop funding not only from the involved funder but from others in the field as well. If one wanted to impair an agency, this would be a way to do so.

The way that evaluation results are disseminated can also have an impact at the policy level, either as a way of promoting changes in policy or for maintenance of the *status quo*. For example, the critical multi-agency review of the intervention in Rwanda was openly broadcast, particularly as a result of the outcry over the genocide and the public demand for an explanation of what had occurred. However, the outcome of the review was a change at the policy level whereby funds are now held in reserve for emergency operations that were not available prior to the Rwanda crisis (Bush, K., Meeting Discussion, 2002). In this case, publicly releasing an evaluation, although on the surface seemingly negative, led to a desired change in policy.

The ability of politics - selection or dissemination - to play a negative role is partially due to the perceptions of inequity of power held by many in this field. There is a predominant sense that funders hold the balance of power because they determine which programmes and initiatives will be supported and by what parameters they will be evaluated. The authors would suggest that one reason for this perception of imbalance relates to the inability of many conflict resolution workers to articulate what they do and to prove their claims of results. Evaluation has the potential to help practitioners articulate their achievements in a manner and language that provides evidence and credibility. Those programmes that truly meet the needs of the situation on the ground are

able to demonstrate that they have accomplished what they claim will be in demand, regardless of power dynamics and motivations, thereby decreasing the perception of inequality. With all stakeholders feeling more secure in their interactions, the potential for negative politics to drive an evaluation will decrease.

EMERGING THEORY IN THE EVALUATION OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION INTERVENTIONS

Through discussions with those with experience and knowledge in conducting evaluations, two gaps in the theoretical understanding of the conflict resolution process have become apparent. Narrowing these gaps is not only important for evaluation but essential to the development of the field as a whole. The first area considers the idea that the results of conflict resolution interventions may be 'transferred' between the micro and macro levels of society. The second gap relates to assessing the validity of the theories of change that underpin interventions in conflict situations. Current evaluation generally explores whether a project has met its stated goals but does not question whether the beliefs about how to instigate change on which the project is based are accurate.

Consideration of these concepts is in a nascent stage. As such there is less material for consideration than with issues pertaining to practice. Nevertheless these concepts have the potential to reach beyond evaluation and influence the entire field by refining many of our approaches to the work of resolving conflict.

Emerging Theory: Micro-Macro Connection

The terms 'micro' and 'macro' are entering into common use in the field of conflict resolution and particularly in discussions of intervention results. However, there remains much confusion about what these terms mean and very limited conflict-specific academic information about how the concepts interact with the field.[10] As part of the focus of this section is the process through which change is transferred beyond the direct participants in an intervention, it is important to have clearly defined terms with which to discuss this issue.

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[10] A series of web searches, a review of 20 peace and conflict-related journals and a literature review found only eleven articles with a specific mention of the micro-macro dynamic.

One useful way to conceptualise this idea is by considering who the target of an intervention is, as illustrated in the left column of Diagram 3. A conflict resolution project can seek to influence individuals, communities or the entire society and the project will be planned and delivered differently depending on which tier its primarily target is (Church and Shouldice, 2002). The following diagram is used to illustrate the tiers of influence and their corresponding term in the micro-macro discourse:

Diagram 3: Micro-Macro Spectrum

Tiers of Influence[11]	Levels
Family Unit	Micro level
Social Network/Peer Group	Micro level
Community	Mezo level
Sub-National Region	Mezo level
Society at Large/Country	Macro level
Regional Grouping of Countries	Macro level
International	

The correlation between the tiers of influence and micro-macro levels is not definitive. Micro-macro levels are a contextually-driven notion and as such may contract and expand along the tiers of influence as the situation dictates. For instance, in the situation where a conflict is limited to a sub-national region within a country, the levels would contract so work aimed at ultimately influencing this sub-national level would be considered working at the 'macro' level. Moreover, the tiers and levels are not discrete divisions that will necessarily progress in a linear sequence.

When applying the micro-macro levels concept, it is not the size of the project or the direct participants that necessarily determine the level the intervention is working at, but rather whom the process is ultimately attempting to influence or change. A 'macro' project attempts to effect change that will shift the overall situation towards peace, thus 'whom' refers to society at large. In contrast, a 'micro' project works to bring about change in more discrete units, thus 'whom' refers to individuals or family units. For instance, a project in Northern Ireland that seeks to assist individuals who have been evicted from

the province by paramilitary organisations is working at the micro level. However, if the aim of that project were expanded to attempting to stop evictions from occurring in the province as a whole, although still working with individuals within the paramilitary organisations, the project would be operating at the macro level.[12]   A second illustration may prove useful. Consider a Track II intervention with the political and rebel leaders of the Congo that seeks to provide the basis for a peace agreement. The direct participants in this project are individuals but the work seeks to have an impact on the country as a whole. This project is therefore working at the macro level.

Most conflict resolution projects are targeted at one of the tiers of influence. Yet, it is commonly assumed that the information, learning or change that occurs throughout the project also has an impact in the other tiers as well. A central feature of many conflict resolution projects is their claim to be able to influence a broader population beyond the direct programme participants. How and if this process occurs, and how it can be tested through evaluation remain subjects of confusion within the field. Some key questions - particularly what this process will be called, what is being passed on through the tiers and how it occurs - need to be further explored.

First, with respect to nomenclature, numerous terms such as 'transfer', 'ripple effect', 'expanding effect'[13], and 'multiplier effect' have all been used to capture this concept. For the purpose of simplicity, the authors have chosen to use the term 'transfer' in this paper. This term, borrowed from the field of knowledge utilisation, is the process by which change is transmitted between levels or tiers. Yet, no consensus on terminology currently exists within the field.

Second, the field needs to determine what is being transferred. There is a spectrum of possibilities, such as information, metaphors, stories, experiences, attitudes, feelings, specific skills, institutions and new ways of thinking about relationships among the parties (Ross, M., Meeting Discussion, 2002). For example, if an Israeli youth participates in a cross-community exchange programme and interacts with a Palestinian youth, both young people may be able to transfer some of the stories they have learned, the experiences that they have had and the change in attitudes that they have undergone to members of their peer group or family.

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[11] This diagram is adapted from the Tiers of Influence in Church, C. and Shouldice, J. (2002) *The Evaluation of Conflict Resolution Interventions: Framing the State of Play.* Derry/Londonderry: INCORE, p.39.

[12] Here the assumption is that a cessation of evictions would be a marked improvement in the overall status of peace.

[13] Term used by Dr Amr Abdalla.

The affirmative nature of the field means that there tends to be an assumption that any change transferred is positive. However, this is not always the case - negative experiences, attitudes etc. can also be transferred. If the Israeli and Palestinian youths have a negative impression of one another, those experiences can also be transferred to other tiers. This is important as it affects the strategies used in conflict resolution work. Through evaluation it may be found that attitudes shared through stories are better transferred within communities than statistics or personal experiences. Evaluation will also allow practitioners a better understanding of how to target their work to reach the broadest possible group of people.

Third, if this practice of transfer does occur, the process through which the new perspectives are shared between the tiers of influence also needs to be examined. At a practice level, there are a number of methods through which transfer can be promoted. These include the empowerment of communities; the development of new programmes; environmental changes; the acquisition of new insights; the sharing of images, experiences and skills; or imitation of others (Ross, M., Meeting Discussion, 2002). However, within this spectrum of options, the field also needs to determine what the essential multipliers are. In other words, which individuals, conditions or situations are critical for promoting transfer or maximising the transfer that occurs?

Once identified, through the use of these tools, projects may be able to have an impact on the tiers of influence beyond their target groups. The authors propose that this movement should be seen in terms of steps rather than as a direct impact from a micro project on the macro level. As seen in Diagram 4, a project that operates at one tier of influence may have a more potent impact on its surrounding levels and only to a limited degree at more distant levels. For example, a cross-community project that works directly with families is likely to transfer more of its impact to the individual and community levels than to the regional or national level. Similarly, if a dialogue project works with national leaders, its most potent influence will likely be at the societal or regional level. This does not mean that projects do not have impact at all levels. Yet, the most significant transfer occurs at the levels that are closest to the original implementation.

Diagram 4: Steps of Impact
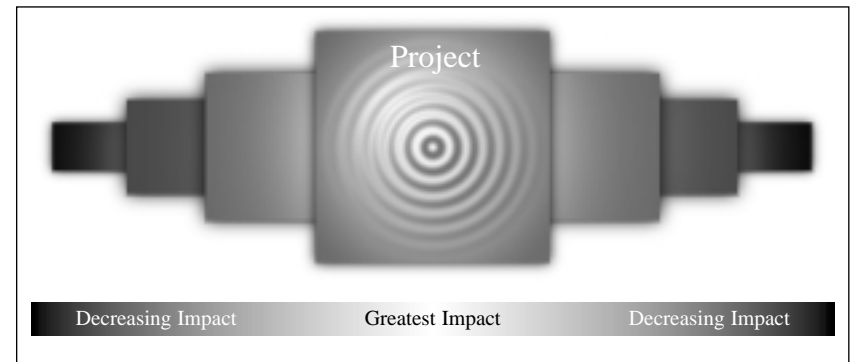
Finally, much of the uncertainty around what is being transferred and how transfer occurs comes from the difficulty with evaluating the theory and practice of transfer. The concept of transfer has been one of the foundational pillars of a number of projects, particularly at the level of elite interactions. Work by Kelman (1995) with Israeli and Palestinian officials, and by Arthur (1999) with Catholic and Protestant politicians in Northern Ireland, has attempted to show how intensive workshops with senior, politically influential individuals from conflicting groups could affect the peace process. The goal of the work was two-fold: to change the perceptions of the individual participants and to transfer those changes into the political debate and the decision-making process (Kelman, 1995). In this case, the work is done with individuals at the macro-level but seeks to transfer change to other aspects of the micro and mezo levels.

Kelman was able to show how his workshops had had an impact on the peace process by breaking down the process of transfer into a series of steps or conceptual 'links in a chain'. According to Kelman, it is the succession of these steps that accounts for the impact. Therefore, each step is individually tested using appropriate methods. For example, one of the steps in the process involves changing the nature of the interactions between participants. An empirical test for this change is to show an increase in analytical, non-adversarial discourse and a decrease in polemical, historical and legalistic arguments that emphasise blame. Similar processes are undertaken to observe and measure change at each step (Kelman, no date).

Determining how, when and why transfer occurs is important to the conflict resolution field as it would allow for the strategic development of projects that maximise their potential to effect change. Although there is a general belief that transfer occurs, the theory needs to be refined so that it can be tested and examined in practice.

Macroevaluation

Macroevaluation, defined as the process of determining the overall contribution to 'peace' of all individual conflict resolution projects in an area, constitutes a related gap in knowledge in this field. In essence, this asks how, why and whether all conflict resolution projects bring peace closer? Although there is a field-wide belief that this occurs, it is not understood why or how the outcomes and impacts of individual projects combine, or how this process can be evaluated. The task is not as simple as adding up the contributions that each individual project makes; many different levels, targets and sectors are involved, as well as the positive impacts of some projects being cancelled out by the negative impacts of others. It is also possible that the interaction between some projects creates a result that is greater than the sum of their individual parts. Macroevaluation needs to take all of these factors into consideration.

Upon further review, the authors determined that this process of assessing contribution is not limited to the 'macro' level and that similar processes could be undertaken at the 'mezo' level. For example, a group of small projects operating in a community may combine to determine their collective contribution to reaching a common goal. Although this evaluation is not carried out at the macro-level, the process of determining the overall contribution of the projects would be the same. A more inclusive term may then need to be considered that reflects the fact that the process can be executed at multiple levels. Some possibilities could include 'overarching impact assessment' or 'contribution assessment'.

Regardless of the level at which this process is carried out, there remain many questions about how best to assess multi-project contributions. Due to the newness of the task, however, the field needs to consider a number of different approaches and to recognise that a single standard model or methodology may not be an appropriate goal (Ross, M., Meeting Discussion, 2002). One possibility is to adapt methods currently used for cluster evaluations – where a number of projects in a particular thematic or geographic grouping that have

been supported by the same funder are evaluated together. The goal is to observe trends, accomplishments and gaps in the area of work (Birkoff, J., Meeting Discussion, 2002). Another possibility would be to explore the approach used by other macro-level assessments, such as the Strategic Conflict Assessment. This assessment mechanism, utilised by the UK Department for International Development (DFID), provides a macro analysis of a region of interest, using a multi-sector approach (Goodhand, J., Meeting Discussion, 2002).

Pursuing the notion of macroevaluation will be valuable for the field for a number of reasons. If positive contributions can be clearly identified, the findings could greatly improve the overall legitimacy and credibility of the field by proving what the work has been able to accomplish (Hoffman, M., Meeting Discussion, 2002). Such findings could also increase the standing of conflict resolution on the world political stage, encouraging the involvement of CR practitioners and theorists at the international policy level (Fitzduff, M., Meeting Discussion, 2002).

Finally, by being able to view the overall picture during the conflict, key issues can be identified; such as what is occurring, areas in which there are gaps, where project efforts are contradicting each other or where work is synergising to create a broader impact. Although some people in the field feel that macroevaluation would only be carried out at the end of a conflict or once an agreement has been fully implemented, this need not be the case. The findings from the work can provide useful strategic information that can assist with the implementation of the peace process. Further, the findings can also provide a measure of achievement towards the end goals.

There are a number of challenges to successfully implementing this idea. One in particular is the fact that a comprehensive understanding of the impact of conflict resolution cannot be accomplished in isolation. It is necessary to explore related fields and sectors, such as economics, development, democratisation and security. In a conflict or post-conflict society, all of these aspects interact in such a way that proving causality is very difficult. Moreover, the passage of time makes attributing an impact to any one project or sector virtually impossible. The field will need not only to look at its own methods for initiating macroevaluation but also to explore how to build bridges with other fields so that more comprehensive assessments can be undertaken.

Emerging Theory: Evaluating the Ideas that Underpin our Actions[14]

Throughout the meeting on evaluation of conflict resolution interventions in Northern Ireland the notion of 'theories of change' was repeatedly raised as an important issue for the field to address. This attention mirrored that given to the idea in several other meetings held recently on evaluation and impact in the United States.[15] Participants in these meetings stressed the fact that practitioners' beliefs about change, which are rarely articulated, underpin key decision-making processes in the development of conflict resolution interventions. Beyond this assertion, however, there was minimal discussion about defining the concept, identifying or describing different possible theories and developing evaluation mechanisms as a means of testing and refining these ideas.

The consensus about the importance of exploring theories of change coupled with the nascent nature of the conceptual discussion compelled the authors to look beyond the conference dialogue. The resulting research found a complete dearth of literature addressing theories of change in conflict resolution. However, numerous related concepts within the field were uncovered, as well as a model of theory-based evaluation developed originally for community development initiatives. During this research it became clear that narrowing the gap between theory and practice in this area could have significant benefits for conflict resolution as a field because evaluators would be able to determine, through the articulation and subsequent evaluation of theories of change and working assumptions, if project underachievement was due to poor implementation or conceptual inaccuracies in the project design.

An extensive search for information on, and references to, theories of change was conducted, using not only peace and conflict resources, but also resources from the fields of sociology, development and civil society.[16] The fruits of this research were extremely meagre. Literature on this topic is scarce to non-existent within the field of peace and conflict, although a vague mention of theories of change was found in a few places. Unfortunately, such references were generally limited to a few sentences in the conclusion or general references that did not explore the concepts, offer potential theories or examine their relevance to the field.

The phrase 'theories of social change' is common currency in the field of sociology. However, sociological theories of change tend to offer explanations of why change occurs rather than suggestions for how change can be initiated. In a few cases - Marxism, for example - a model of the nature of society and social change contributes ideas about how change may then be generated. However, in most cases, the contributions of sociologists are more descriptive than prescriptive and are all but impossible to apply to the production of change.[17]

In the 1960s, a subfield of sociology known as 'planned change' began to develop, with the intention of addressing this shortcoming.[18] In 1961, for example, Chin and Benne wrote an article entitled 'General Strategies for Effecting Changes in Human Systems'[19] in which they outlined three different approaches to change, relating beliefs about human motivation to the methods used to induce positive social change. This subfield is not easy to pin down as it draws on, and deals with, a number of different types of change and areas of focus (e.g. education, management, social work, behavioural change). Nevertheless, further investigation into this work may well provide valuable insights for the field of conflict resolution.

The research process was not successful in terms of identifying material specific to theories of change in relation to conflict resolution. However, in searching for theories, a number of related concepts - 'theories of conflict', 'theories of conflict resolution' and 'theories of practice' were revealed. As the research progressed the theoretical boundaries between these concepts became increasingly blurred and it became evident that there was a need for conceptual clarity. Analysis showed that these concepts were not only interrelated but also significant to the understanding of how theories of change interplay with decision-making and the subsequent potential of evaluation to contribute to the field. As a result, the authors decided on a secondary goal of attempting to clarify the meanings of these notions and their relationship to each other.

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[14] Helen Barnes, Policy & Evaluation Intern, INCORE – Autumn 2002, contributed to research and analysis in this section.

[15] The issue was raised at both the Reflecting on Peace Practice Advisory Group meetings throughout 2001-2002 and the ACRON-RPP Meeting on Evaluation in Milwaukee, USA, March 2002.

[16] Details can be found in Appendix 1.

[17] For an outline of standard sociological theories of change, see Appelbaum, Richard P. (1970), *Theories of Social Change*, Chicago: Markham Publishing Co.

[18] For a brief account of the emergence of this subfield, see London, S. (1996, June) 'Understanding Change: The Dynamics of Social Transformation', [On-line] Available Internet: www.scottlondon.com/reports/change.html

[19] Subsequently updated, the latest edition, referred to in the Bibliography, dates to 1989.

Determining the relationships between these concepts was complicated by the fact that the term theory is used inconsistently in the field. Moreover, 'theory' implies grandiose notions of interrelated, logically driven systems which is far more complex than what is found in this context. As a result, conceptual summaries for the key concepts - 'theories of conflict', 'theories of conflict resolution', 'theories of practice' and 'theories of change - have been developed. The phrase 'working assumptions about change' is a new distinction, introduced because it was found that the field fails to distinguish between general sets of beliefs about how to generate widespread change and the working assumptions held by practitioners about the connection between specific activities and desired change. By making this distinction the concern with the use of the term 'theory' in the more practical notion of project planning and implementation is addressed, as well as showing the different stages in which conceptual theory and working assumptions become most relevant.

It is important to ascertain the relationship between these concepts because theories of change and working assumptions interact with the cognitive process of analysing and developing an action plan. Capturing the significance of those theories and assumptions depends on a clear understanding of that cognitive process and where each has the most impact. An appreciation of the distinction between theories of change and working assumptions can also be aided through the clarification of the relationship between concepts.

Conceptual Summaries:

Theories of Conflict determine the origin(s) or cause(s) of conflict. Examples include Innatist or Psychological beliefs about what makes individuals aggressive, Group-Identity theories such as Social Identity Theory or Miscommunication Theory and systems-level beliefs such as the power and resource-dominated Realist approach. These theories respond to the question: *Why is there conflict?* or *What went wrong?*

Theories of Conflict Resolution consider what needs to happen to bring about the resolution of a conflict and therefore set the overarching goal of what one is trying to achieve (e.g. equality, diversity). They try to answer the question: *What needs to be achieved to end this conflict?*

Theories of Practice establish a method or strategy for addressing a conflict. Most widely known are the six theory of practice examples for ethnic conflict outlined by Ross,[20] among which are community relations, principled negotiation and conflict transformation. These theories consider the question: *How can the change or goal as determined by the theory(s) of conflict resolution be achieved?*

Theories of Change are generalised beliefs about how and why widespread change can be generated in a violent conflict. An example might be the belief that peace comes through transformative change of a critical mass of individuals, or that peace will come about when it is in the interest of leaders to take the necessary steps (Woodrow, 2002: 1). Theories of change respond to the question: *What are the mechanisms through which the desired change(s) can be generated?* or *How is change generated in a society in violent conflict?*

Working Assumptions about Change refer to specific assumptions made at the level of project design and implementation about the transformative effect of each discrete action/activity. Projects have multiple actions/activities that make up a whole. Within the overall planning of a Track II series of dialogues, for example, the decision to hold a meeting outside the country of conflict is based on a working assumption about change. Working assumptions also underpin the selection criteria for participants, the choice of facilitation style and the proposed agenda, in addition to every other discrete action/activity that forms part of the project. These assumptions may or may not be related to a theory of change and are often implicit. They respond to the question: *How and why will this discrete action lead to the desired change?*

In order to understand how 'theories of change' and 'working assumptions about change' affect an intervention, the five key concepts defined above have been applied to a four-stage intervention lifecycle: conflict exploration, projectconceptualisation, project design and implementation and project evaluation.

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[20] See Ross, M.H. (2000, November) 'Creating the conditions for peacemaking: theories of practice in ethnic conflict resolution' *Ethnic and Racial Studies volume 23, number 6*, pp.1002-1034.

Diagram 5: Stages of an Intervention
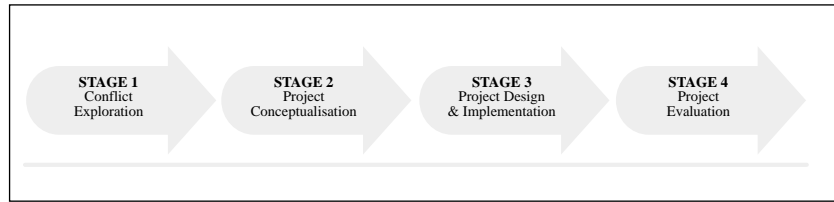
The authors recognise that this application is primarily from a theoretical perspective and therefore omits much of the practical issues associated. While theoretically-derived processes often lack practical application potential, in this case it is important to engage in the theoretical discussion to provide the foundations for a better understanding on which practical application possibilities can be grounded. The purpose of establishing the relationships between these concepts is neither to propose a new intervention lifecycle nor to argue that this is an explicit and accepted process in practice. In fact, the contrary is more the reality, where these concepts interact so seamlessly that little distinction can be found. By outlining these relationships in terms of a four-stage process, it becomes possible to identify where and how theories of change and working assumptions about change interact and become relevant in the theoretical intervention process.

Diagram 6: Development of Theoretical Foundations
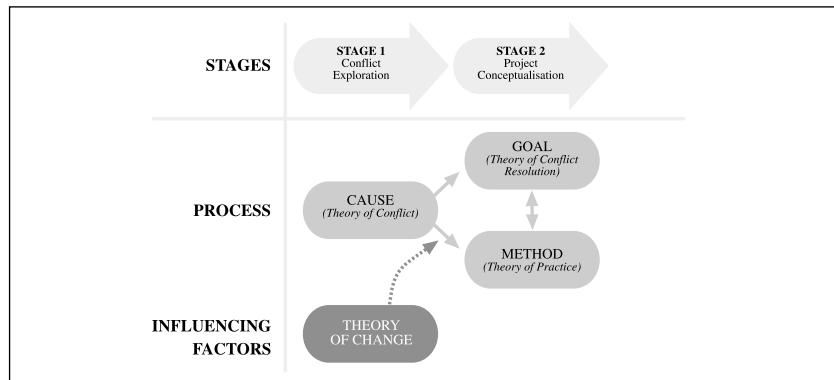
The first two stages provide the theoretical foundations for an intervention, while the third translates theory into practice and the fourth examines the results. As is depicted in Diagram 6, in the first stage, the cause(s) of the conflict is/are determined through careful analysis, thus establishing one's theory of conflict. Once determined, stage 2 involves an interactive process whereby overarching goals or what needs to be done to 'resolve' the conflict (theory of conflict resolution) and methods to do so (theory of practice) are established. The precise relationship between theory of conflict resolution and theory of practice is likely to be unique to each situation. Although there are various influences on the transition process from stage 1 to stage 2, an individual's theory(s) of change plays a significant role.In stage 3, these ideas (causes, goals and method) are translated into practice in the form of project design and implementation (see Diagram 7). The theory of conflict resolution provides the overarching goal or vision while the theory of practice offers the principles and parameters for project design. Fundamental to this translation are the working assumptions about change which (often implicitly) form the basis of many decisions.
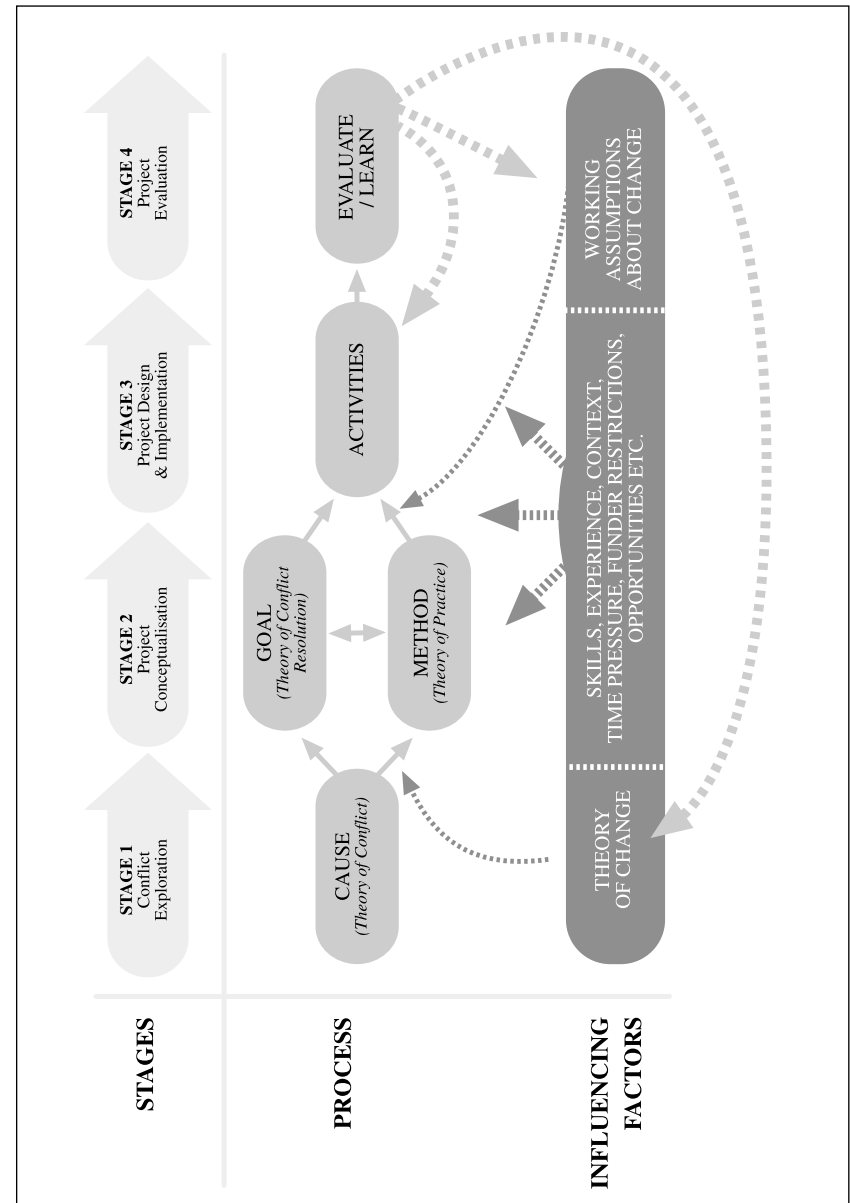
Diagram 7: Transition to Action
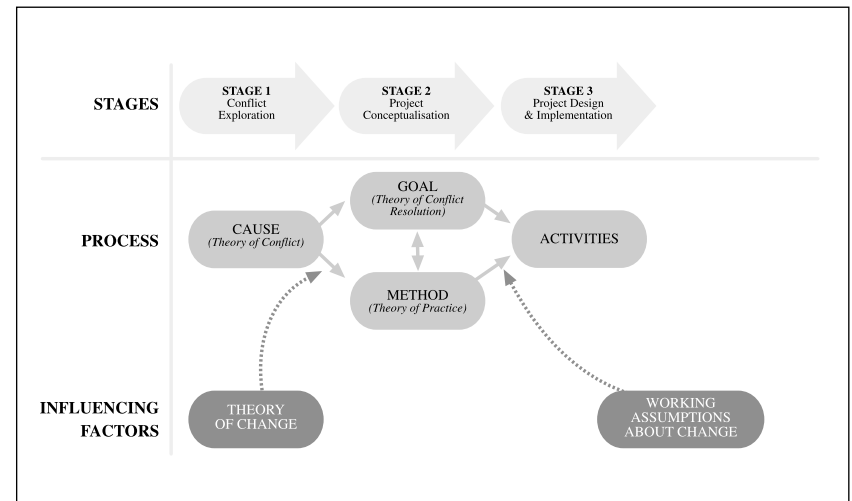
The final stage is project evaluation where, it is argued, three elements should be assessed: theory of change, working assumptions and implementation measures.[21] The results of this investigation should then feed back into the overall process. It is recognised that, in practice, much of what has been described is implicit. As is often the case, in attempting to structure and articulate an idea, an unrealistically 'tidy' or discrete concept develops. Nonetheless it is still a useful exercise to consider. A comprehensive depiction of these relationships may be found in Diagram 8.

The four-stage process is not as simple as the above description may suggest. For any given conflict, a practitioner could determine several causes (theories of conflict), derive numerous fundamental issues that need addressing (theories of conflict resolution), generate several different methods to be used (theories of practice) and therefore elaborate a variety of detailed activity plans. Furthermore there are other variables that influence this equation. Factors such as one's experience and skills, the specific conflict context, funder requirements, opportunities, time pressures and resource limitations (money or staff) also influence all stages of the process. These factors may often appear to be more influential than theories of change or assumptions because they are generally made explicit - something that the former would benefit from and an issue that will soon be addressed.

It is worth revisiting briefly the distinction between 'theory of change' and 'working assumptions about change.' While a theory of change is a generalised belief about how or why widespread change can be achieved, working assumptions about change link a discrete action with an explanation of how that action will instigate the desired change; in essence, why and how action x will create change y. Briefly shifting to the practical application of this distinction; one's theory of change would be a significant driver behind the type of project selected, such as mediation or non-violent protest, whereas the working assumptions about change would underpin the decisions regarding how to design the project.

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[21] Implementation measures, in this context, is used as an umbrella term to refer to the multitude of other aspects of a project that can be evaluated, such as process and results.

Diagram 8: The Complete Process

In the intervention process described, working assumptions have their role in the transition from stage 2 to stage 3. General theories of change, meanwhile, have their greatest impact in the transition between stages 1 and 2. It is hypothesised that the theory of change forms, to some degree, the basis from which the working assumptions derive. That said, the relationship between a practitioner's theory of change and their working assumptions is an area that needs further study.

As mentioned above, unlike theories of conflict or practice, there are no dominant typologies that lay out the current theories of change in this field and virtually nothing available at present that purports to define, describe or test such theories. However, Peter Woodrow of CDR Associates has developed a draft set of theories based on an analysis of 26 'peace' interventions around the world, primarily initiated by external organisations.[22] Although Woodrow has chosen to refer to his models as Theories of Peacebuilding, the accompanying description suggests that they are closely related to the 'theories of change' of this paper: "A useful first step in enhancing our ability to develop effective strategies is to become more conscious of our underlying [beliefs] about how change comes about - that is, our theories of how to achieve peace." (Woodrow, 2002: 1) To date, Woodrow has identified and defined eight theories:

- The Individual Change Model, whereby peace depends on the transformative change of a critical mass of individuals;

- The Healthy Relationships and Connections Model, which posits that peace results from a process of breaking down divisions and prejudices between groups;

- The Withdrawal of the Resources for War Model, whereby interrupting the supply of people and goods to the war-making system will cause it to collapse;

- The Reduction of Violence Model, which suggests that reducing the levels of violence perpetrated by combatants or their representatives will allow peace to develop;

- The Root Causes/Justice Model, which holds that peace results from addressing underlying issues of justice, exploitation, threats to identity and security and people's sense of victimisation;

- The Institutional Development Model, whereby peace is ensured through stable/reliable social institutions that guarantee democracy and human rights;

- The Changes in Political Elites Model, which suggests that peace depends on political (and other) leadership considering it in their interests to take the necessary steps;

- The Grassroots Mobilisation Model, which holds that "When the people lead, the leaders will follow."[23]

This is by no means an exhaustive list, nor is it intended to be so by Woodrow whose work is very much in its preliminary stages. Moreover, while drawn from practical case studies, none of these theories has been evaluated for effectiveness in producing the desired change.

Making the Connection: Evaluating Theories and Assumptions

The influence of theories of change and working assumptions on the planning and development of an intervention is clear. The focus now turns to stage 4 of the intervention lifecycle: project evaluation. The discussion begins with a look at the relevance of theories and working assumptions to the evaluation discussion. From there, a theory-based evaluation model, developed for the field of community development, will be discussed with particular emphasis on its applicability for conflict resolution interventions.

Initiating a theory and assumption evaluation of conflict resolution work could result in a number of benefits. Systematic review or evaluation of theories of change would provide the field with information about the potential effectiveness of different approaches to intervention in varying conflict contexts. This information would be invaluable in assisting an organisation to determine which project type (e.g. Track II diplomacy, youth exchange or single identity work) to utilise in a given scenario. In turn, consideration of working assumptions would enable practitioners to test and refine the assumptions that link intended outcomes (desired change) with selected activities. Evaluation which includes this focus would allow for distinctions between failures of implementation and conceptually flawed working assumptions; in essence, whether a project was poorly executed or whether the

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[22] These case studies were conducted for the RPP process and many can be found on-line at www.cdainc.com.

[23] For further details, see Woodrow, P. (2002, November). *Theories of Peacebuilding* Unpublished Paper, p.1.

ideas of why activity *x* would create change *y* were inaccurate. This knowledge could then be applied to develop more effective programming.

Theories of change and working assumptions are relevant to an evaluation discussion in a second important way. Evaluators themselves come to the job with established theories and assumptions, which can affect the evaluation design and subsequent analysis. Efforts should be made to uncover these preconceived notions in order to minimise unintended effects on the evaluation (Strimling, 2002). In addition, as will be discussed below, evaluators can also play a significant role in facilitating the process whereby practitioners identify their own theories and assumptions. This facilitation can prove difficult for many practitioners (Connell and Kubisch, 1996), and evaluators' own notions need to be kept in check so as to avoid 'leading' the stakeholders down an inaccurate path.

Theory Based Evaluation - An Approach for Consideration

Indications throughout the conflict resolution field suggest that it has evolved to a point where it is now ready to turn inward and examine its own theories and working assumptions. Although not developed with conflict resolution interventions in mind, theory-based evaluation (TBE) has considerable potential for the field in this endeavour. In essence, TBE explores 'how and why an initiative works.'(Connell and Kubisch, 1996: 1). These ideas are, to date, not articulated in much of the field's work.

The use of the term 'theory' in the name of this approach differs from the way in which it has been defined in this paper. For Weiss, the founder of this approach, a theory is the 'set of hypotheses upon which people build their program plans' (Weiss, 1998: 55). With this, she combines both beliefs and assumptions in one concept. Although she shares the concern that the use of the term 'theory' could confuse interpretations of this approach if readers infer from the term a complex and interrelated set of propositions, she nonetheless continues to use it. Conversely, this article argues for a differentiation between beliefs as part of an individual's overarching theory of change and working assumptions as the more specific ideas that drive actions. Despite this, Weiss's use of theory of change to signify both beliefs and assumptions will be followed for the ensuing discussion on theory-based evaluation. One of the outstanding questions for the TBE method is indeed how one might adapt it to recognise that differences exist between the two in conflict resolution.

The idea of theory-guided programme evaluation was introduced by Weiss in 1971 and has been elaborated on by a number of different scholars since.[24] TBE asserts that an intervention can be broken into its component activity parts and the working assumptions that connect each activity to its desired outcome (change) can be hypothesised. The evaluation activity then collects data to identify how well each step of the sequence is borne out. 'The evaluation should show which of the assumptions underlying the program break down, where they break down, and which of the several theories underlying the program are best supported by the evidence.' (Weiss, 1997: 2). By focusing on how change is actually being generated, it is possible to tease out what is really working in specific situations and under certain circumstances.

Although theory-based evaluations utilise classic research methodologies, to date there is not a dominant application of the theory-based approach; nor is there one single method for uncovering the theory of change underpinning an intervention.[25] Connell and Kubisch (1996), considering Comprehensive Community Initiatives, have developed one way of applying TBE. Their three-stage application includes:

1) Surfacing and articulating a theory of change,

2) Measuring a project's activities and intended outcomes, and

3) Analysing and interpreting the results of an evaluation, including their implications for adjusting the initiative's theory of change and its allocation of resources.

Stage 1 - surfacing and articulating a theory of change - requires its own process. 'The evaluator starts by defining long-term objectives and works backwards from the endpoint through the steps required to get there. Early stages or intermediate objectives are then established for each step, so that the programme can be evaluated and if necessary modified, at any [time].' (Sefton, 2000: 14). The next phase is to identify the causal link - why activities result in certain outcomes - known as the theory of change.

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[24] In particular Huey-tshy Chen, who has been working on theory-driven evaluation approaches since 1981. See also Connell and Kubisch (1996).

[25] There is limited literature available that directly articulates means to apply theory-based evaluations.

This evaluation approach offers a range of advantages to those engaged in the process. Those that are particularly relevant to the conflict resolution field or address current challenges for the evaluation of interventions will be explored here.

As Church and Shouldice discuss in *The Evaluation of Conflict Resolution Interventions: Framing the State of Play* (2002), the challenges associated with measuring the outcomes and impact of conflict resolution interventions are often revisited. Theory-based evaluation offers in-roads to three of these challenges. First, funding parameters often encourage short-term projects, with evaluations conducted before the intended impact is anticipated to have taken effect. The TBE evaluation approach, however, 'provides early indications of program effectiveness' and need not wait for final outcomes to appear or fail to appear.' (Weiss, 1998: 60). By breaking down the project into its component activities the evaluator can examine the intermediate stages to determine if they are progressing as anticipated and can therefore give an indication of whether the intended final outcomes will result. Second, the focus on intermediate steps builds adaptability into project design (Hughes and Traynor, 2000: 43), something that the constantly changing context of conflict situations requires. Third, as TBE considers how and why effects occur, it decreases - although does not entirely eradicate - the challenge of causation that agencies face when attempting to identify whether their project provided the impetus for the identified change (Weiss, 1998; Connell and Kubisch, 1996).

This approach also offers insight into how agencies in the field can decrease or neutralise unintended effects. 'As very few evaluators indicated that they currently look for unintended impacts as part of their strategy, the first challenge is to ascertain effective means of scanning for unintended effects of interventions, both during the course of the project and during the evaluation phase.' (Church and Shouldice, 2002: 49). While uncovering the theories that underpin programs, the evaluator can also facilitate the participants to reflect on theories that would explain unintended consequences. Discussing an unplanned or unwanted chain of events that the program may instigate could allow the agency to take steps to reduce or avoid consequences (Weiss, 1998).

Finally, when instigated early in the intervention, TBE can enrich planning and implementation because it encourages stakeholders to specify intended outcomes and the activities needed to achieve those outcomes, and to incorporate potentially relevant external factors (Connell and Kubisch, 1996). From the outset, this can expose contradictions between colleagues that may be detrimental to a programme's success (Weiss, 1998).

As ever, with advantages come disadvantages. Two of particular salience to the conflict field will be discussed. First, the generation of theories of change can be a difficult process. One of the suggested methods is to offer the practitioners involved a series of hypotheses as a starting point. In order to develop these hypotheses, the evaluator needs to have expertise in three areas; conflict resolution processes, evaluation research methods and the theory-based evaluation approach. As the meeting in Northern Ireland indicated, finding evaluators with the first two areas of expertise is difficult enough. Adding a third variable will further decrease the pool of qualified candidates. Second, those who propose this model acknowledge that it is a data and research intensive exercise, requiring practitioners to have not only the time to participate in the evaluation but also considerable finances to support an evaluator on a long-term basis. Excess time and money are two things that agencies working on conflict rarely have.

Despite these challenges, theory-based evaluation is a step in the right direction. Evaluating theories of change and working assumptions could provide catalysts that propel the field through its own evolution. There are many outstanding questions related both to the model proposed in the beginning of this section and to how theory-based evaluation would hold up when applied to conflict interventions. Exploration into both will serve to push the field forward.

CONCLUSION

Sufficient experience in the design and implementation of conflict resolution interventions has now been acquired to encourage more criticism of how the interventions are conducted and more sophisticated analysis of their effects. Phase Two of INCORE's research project on the evaluation of conflict resolution interventions sought to explore some of the questions and challenges associated with improving the methods of assessing the effects of the field's work. Through this exploration four crosscutting themes - two practice and two theory - emerged that are significant to the discussion of a number of these challenges. This paper aims to document those discussions and contribute to further research and analysis.

Many of the issues related to emerging practice concentrate on decisions that are taken throughout the evaluation process. Those involved in the evaluation make many choices - such as the type of evaluator they wish to have or the level of engagement of the evaluator - which will ultimately affect the utility and appropriateness of the information that is uncovered. As discussed in the section entitled Politics: The Invisible Hand, these choices are sometimes made out of ignorance or ease rather than a conscious decision based on an analysis of options. Stakeholders must become more aware of the possibility for these aspects to influence the evaluation and see the potential to make critical decisions that can improve the evaluation process and its findings.

From the perspective of emerging theory, as a field, CR needs to examine the theoretical foundations on which much of the work is based. Although the possibility of discovering that some approaches are not as effective as has been believed has created both a fear and an avoidance of evaluation by many practitioners, it remains an important next step to refining the way in which the work is currently done. It is particularly important to determine if project underachievement is due to poor implementation or is a result of conceptual inaccuracies in its design.

There are many subtle differences in the theories involved in the delivery of conflict resolution programmes - from theories of conflict and theories of conflict resolution to theories of practice and theories of change. The language and analysis used in discussions of theory must be deepened to reflect this complexity. It is only through a better understanding of the multiple theories that operate throughout the project lifecycle and affect the programmatic choices made at the field level that practice will be improved.

Evaluation has, to date, provided some useful information, yet it remains severely under-utilised and often overly simplistic. Through consideration of more of the complex factors that influence evaluation, the CR field will be able to produce better and more nuanced evaluations of its work that will serve to improve both practice and theory.

APPENDIX 1
Research Resources:
Evaluation and Theories of Change

Techniques included:

- **Generalised keyword web-searches.**

- **Reviews of publication lists of key academic institutions:**
  - Bradford
  - ICAR/GMU
  - LSE - CADU
  - Tufts - Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy

- **Reviews of conflict NGO websites:**
  - Berghof Centre
  - Clingendael (including their Conflict Research Unit)
  - International Alert
  - IPA
  - RPP
  - Saferworld

- **Consultation of library catalogues**
  - British Library of Development Studies
  - The LSE
  - Oxford
  - Queens University (Belfast)
  - University of Ulster

- **Keyword and index searches for 15 online conflict resolution journals**
  - ACCORD: African Journal in Conflict Resolution
  - Accord: conflict trends
  - Community Development Journal
  - Conflicts and Change
  - Cooperation and Conflict
  - International Affairs
  - International Journal On World Peace
  - Journal of Conflict Resolution
  - Journal of Peace and Change
  - Journal of Peace Research
  - Negotiation Journal
  - Online Journal of Peace and Conflict Resolution
  - Peace and Conflict Studies
  - Peace Research Abstracts Journal
  - Research in Social Movements
  - Security Dialogue

- **Exploration of Development gateways reached via the IDS website**
  - ELDIS
  - Global Development Network
  - International Institute for Sustainable Development Guide (Civil Society)
  - Id21
  - Participation Resource Centre and Bridge

- **15 emails to "thinkers" in the field and contacts who emerged during the research process.**

APPENDIX II:
Participant Directory
Conflict Resolution & Evaluation Meeting
Northern Ireland, 4-5 July 2002

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Juliana Birkhoff - Independent Scholar, Mediator, Facilitator & Trainer. Nationality: Canadian, Country of Residence: US

Emery Brusset - Director, Channel Research Ltd. Nationality: French, Country of Residence: France

Kenneth Bush - Assistant Professor of Conflict Studies, Masters Program in Conflict Studies, St.Paul University, Ottawa, Canada. Nationality: Canadian, Country of Residence: Switzerland

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'If you don't know where you're going, you'll end up somewhere else'

- Yogi Berra

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