

# Training on conflict

## SOCIAL DIALOGUE PROJECT



## Dear readers,

Establishing dialogue structures at the workplace is a fundamental stepping stone to achieving better working conditions. Sharing this vision, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) and Tchibo initiated a joint two-year project on Social Dialogue in Myanmar in close cooperation with the Industrial Workers Federation of Myanmar (IWFM). >

In Myanmar, a country with a young, but growing garment sector, the Social Dialogue project worked from 2017 to 2020 to establish a structure of meaningful dialogue in garment factories to the benefit of both workers and managers. At the core of the project was Freedom of Association – one of the basic human rights – which states that everyone has the right to join or form organisations that represent their interest.

However, dialogue does not come naturally. Even less so if it is to happen between people who have diverging interests, which is the case within factories. Taking existing power imbalances into account, workers and their representatives need to be provided with the necessary space. The Social Dialogue project aimed to create this space by facilitating dialogue with different techniques.

Thereby, workers, their representatives, unions and managers have the capacity to understand each other's perspectives, take ownership of their interests, and negotiate solutions that are workable for both sides in a factory.

We wish to thank all partners who have contributed their knowledge in compiling this manual and deeply hope that it can play a part in supporting a future that is built on dialogue.

*Julia Thimm  
Head of Human Rights  
Tchibo GmbH*

*Marc Beckmann  
Project Director  
GIZ FABRIC*





# Project Partners

The Social Dialogue project was jointly designed and implemented by Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH on behalf of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and Tchibo GmbH.

Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) promotes international cooperation for sustainable development. The FABRIC project (Promoting Sustainability in the Textile and Garment Industry in Asia) supports the Asian textile industry in its transformation towards fair production for people and the environment. It identifies the common interests of key actors – in factories, ministries, civil society and international

brand manufacturers – and brings them together with the aim of developing a shared vision of sustainability and promoting greater cooperation.

Tchibo stands for a unique business model. Founded in 1949 as a coffee roaster in Hamburg, Germany, the family-owned company today offers not only coffee specialties, but also non-food ranges and services that change on a weekly basis: in its own shops and cafés, in supermarkets and online shops throughout Europe. Tchibo has a strong stance in corporate responsibility that is based on dialogue and empowerment programmes, as well as on sustainable production. It has received several awards, including being named Germany's most sustainable large company.



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# Introduction

This Training on Conflict manual was prepared as part of the Myanmar Social Dialogue project. The purpose of this manual is to support the learning outcomes of the Online Conflict Training course.

**T**he manual serves as a practical toolkit to help leaders or facilitators of managers and workers groups to understand conflict, explore ways to prevent it and reflect on how they can lead in the face of conflict.

The manual uses Lewis Deep Democracy methods as a foundation. It has been enriched by various real-life garment factory cases of conflict that can take place among workers and factory management.

Although we tend to dislike and avoid conflict, this training manual also has an underlying intention to demonstrate the value of conflicts as they represent unique opportunities for growth and improving dialogue in factories.

The manual has been edited and written by Cihan Koral and Idil Ander, international facilitators of the Social Dialogue project.

# This manual will help you to

- understand how and when conflict happens
- learn tools to diagnose tension and conflict and ways to prevent it
- improve your conflict resolution skills
- lead groups more wisely, so they can work more effectively

## What is conflict?

The term ‘conflict’ can be defined in many ways. For the purpose of this manual (and our training), we use the term to indicate internal tension and disagreement in a group, building up to conflict. This manual does not aim at handling interest disputes, dispute resolution mechanisms, negotiation, collective bargaining and mediation. Instead, it focuses on understanding and recognising conflicts and it looks at how conflicts build up and ways to prevent them.

## The method we use

The trainers of this course and authors of this manual are accredited and licensed instructors of Lewis Deep Democracy (LDD). Deep Democracy is a leading conflict resolution technique that facilitates

inclusive decision making and is adaptable to any situation. It uses the different perspectives and the wisdom within the group and assures that all voices are heard. Lewis Deep Democracy has been developed by psychologists Myrna and Greg Lewis in the '90's in South Africa. Their theory and method are now used in more than forty countries across the world in various sectors; from business, politics and health care to education, non-profit and the family and private sphere.

### **How it works**

Lewis Deep Democracy creates a safe space in which different emotions, visions, opinions can be voiced. It assures that every voice in the room is heard and will be included in the decision-making

process. The core idea of the method is to collect as many different perspectives as possible before a decision is made, with special attention to the minority point of view. In group processes we often overlook the wisdom of the minority as we let the majority lead us to our decisions.

Lewis Deep Democracy is also a conflict resolution method: if there is too much tension in a group and there is a lot going on in the undercurrent, making decisions becomes difficult or is no longer possible at all.

## The Iceberg Model

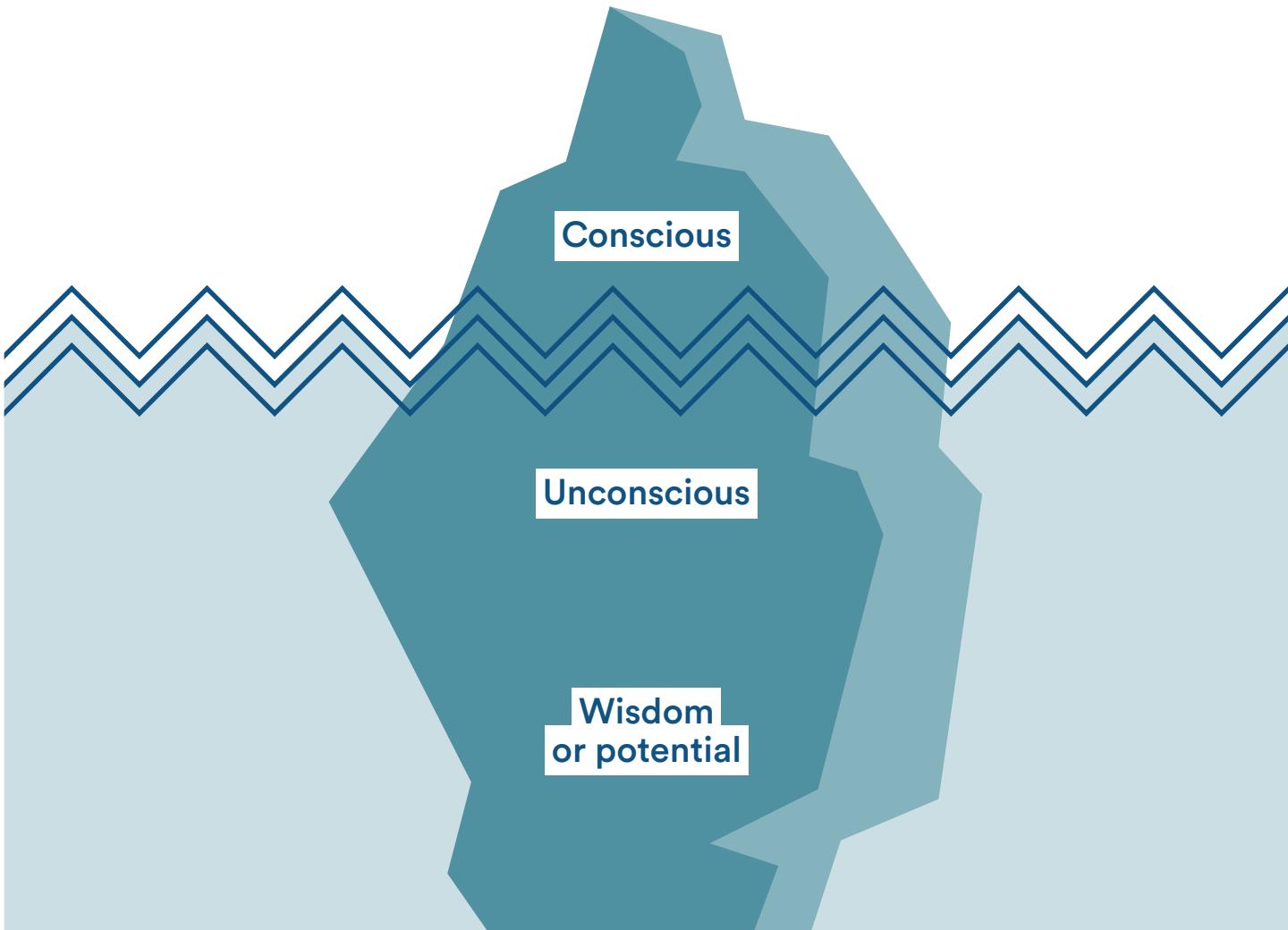
**T**he base model of Lewis Deep Democracy is the 'Iceberg'. It is used as a metaphor for the human psyche. It demonstrates that only a small part of our behaviour, motivation, and emotions is conscious. Above the waterline, so to say. But the majority of what we think, feel and do is rooted in our unconsciousness and takes place below the waterline.

The same metaphor can be used for group behaviour, meaning that

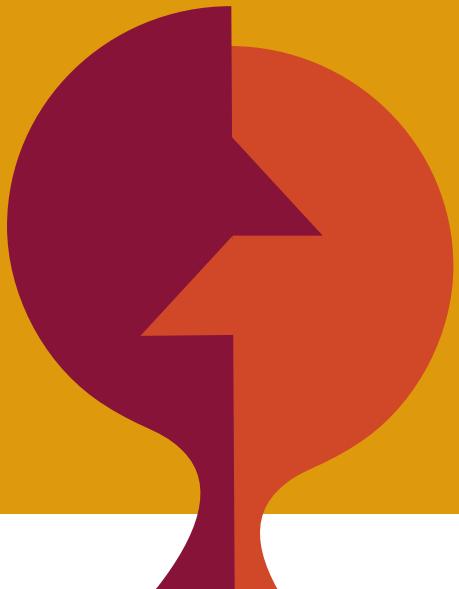
a small part of our interactions is consciously driven, but the biggest part is not.

**Conscious** is when everyone is aware of what is happening. An example is when an agenda is discussed at the beginning of a meeting.

**Unconscious** is when not everyone in the group is aware of what is going on or has access to the same information. To give an example: when a meeting has a stated agenda, sometimes a small group of people >



Lewis Deep Democracy  
works with the belief  
that groups themselves  
hold all the wisdom  
that is needed to  
resolve their issues



come together to gossip or lobby before the meeting, because they have a collective purpose. This small group then has a ‘hidden agenda’ of which not everyone in the group is aware.

The potential of the group lies in the unconscious. LDD works with the belief that groups themselves hold all the wisdom and capabilities that are needed to resolve their issues.

The key to unlock this potential, is by lowering the waterline and sharing information that has been hidden before. When the waterline drops, safety increases. This means more sharing of information, opinions, motives and emotions.

## WHAT HAPPENS ON THE WORKFLOOR

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**“W**hen I tell people to fix mistakes, they sometimes think that I will tattle on them to the boss. This is a serious problem, it happens a lot. We need to do something about that and talk with the workers directly. Communicate with them first, before going to the bosses.”

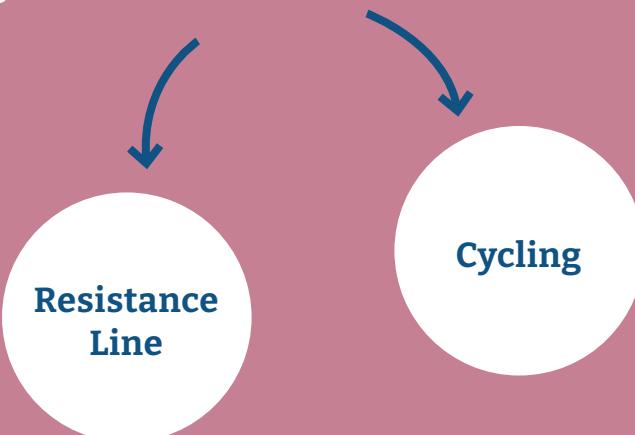
Supervisor in a production line





# How do you recognise a conflict?

Lewis Deep Democracy gives us two main diagnostic tools:



# The Resistance Line

The Resistance Line tool can be used to find out how an individual, group or organisation relates to the way things are going.

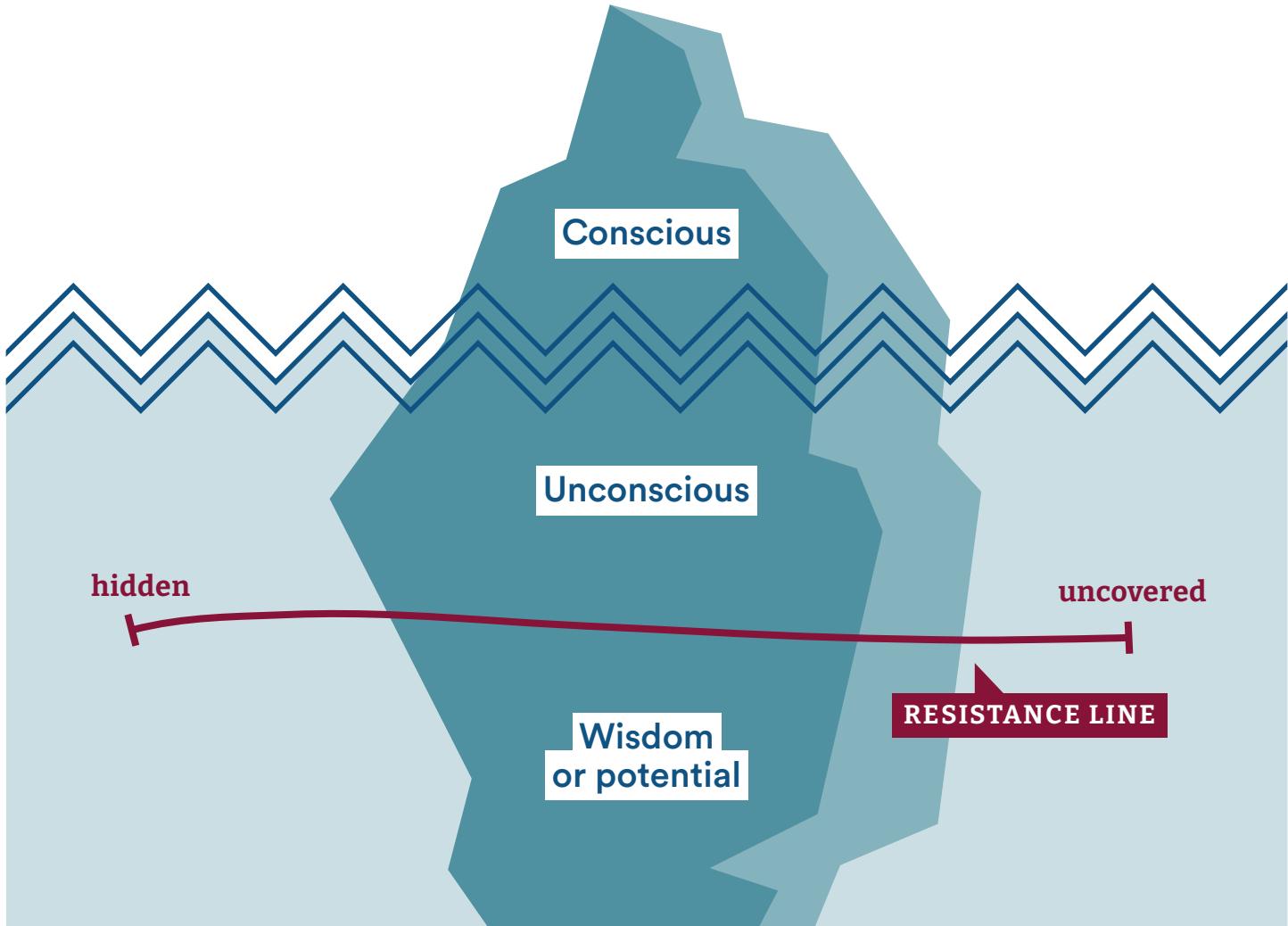
We use 'resistance' to refer to actions that sabotage the status quo or go intentionally against a decision that was made by the group. These actions are often hidden at first, but gradually become uncovered as the resistance increases.

When people find themselves on the Resistance Line, it means they disagree with the view that is held by the majority, but they are not >

## WHAT HAPPENS ON THE WORKFLOOR

**O**ur Human Resource manager often calls me to report my colleague is doing this or that and then asks me to calm her down. We are from the union; she is my deputy. What he is trying to say every time is: 'Why can't you be quiet? Look at the others, they are not protesting like you are.' I tell him that it is good that there are people who bring problems to the table. If people don't express their issues or say anything, you become a dictator with absolute power."

Union leader in a garment factory





saying openly what needs to be said. This will eventually lead to conflict. The longer someone stays on the Resistance Line, the bigger the risk that an issue becomes explosive.

When a decision is made by the majority and the opinion of the minority is cast aside, their first reaction may be to make jokes about the situation because they are not confident enough to say what they

really think or feel. Sometimes a joke is just a joke, but in this case, they often are a resistance activity. **Jokes** on the Resistance Line often have an edge to them and are a reaction to being controlled or dismissed. Openly admitting we are hurt feels uncomfortable. Jokes are an easier way to express our feelings. If the issues behind them are not picked up and addressed, they will get sharper and become **sarcastic jokes**. >

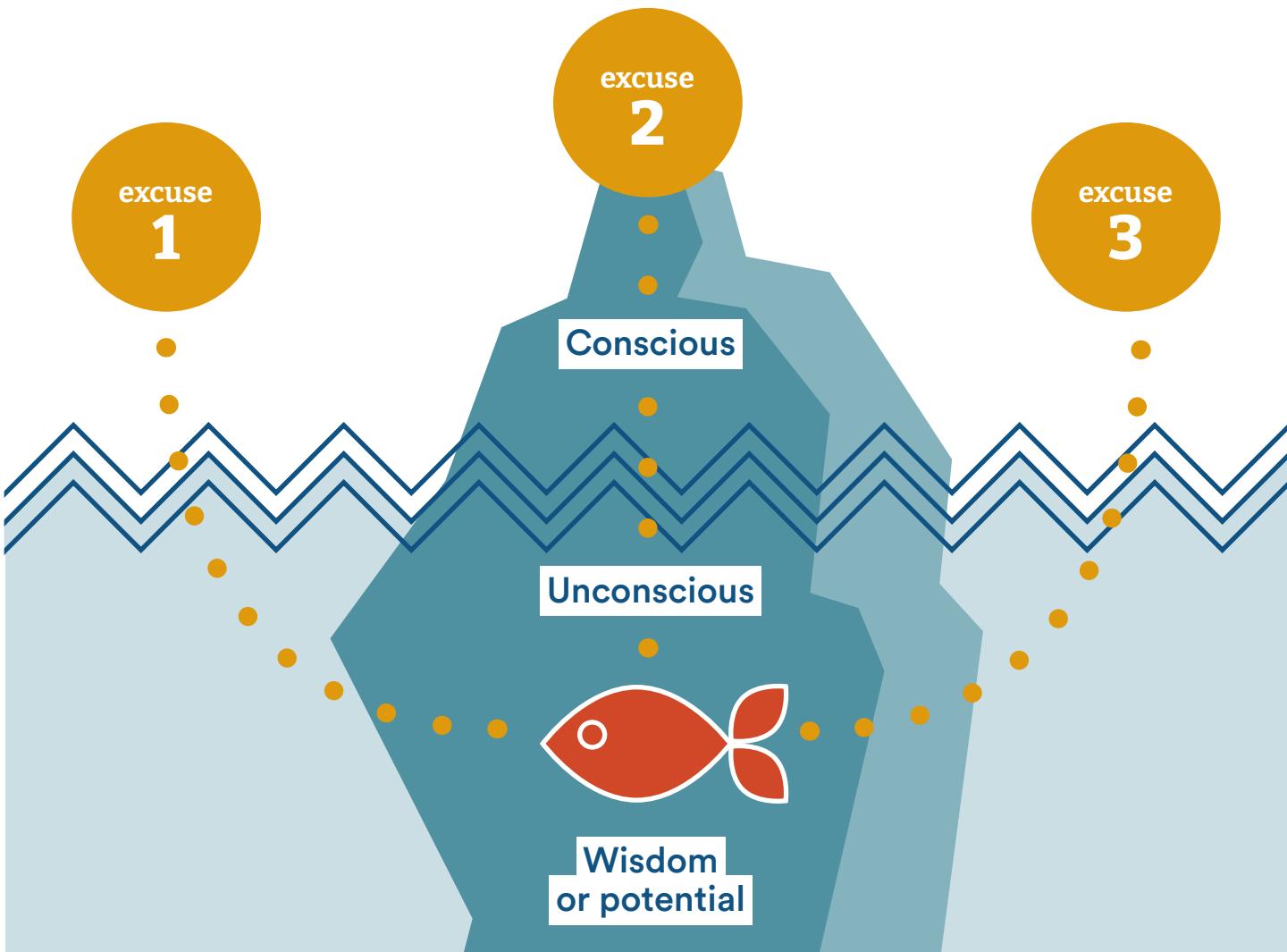
**Making excuses** is another kind of behaviour that can be spotted on the Resistance Line. As with jokes, an excuse can be a genuine expression of what someone feels. But when the excuses continue and increase, we know there is a bigger issue underneath the surface, that wants to be heard.

Issues below the waterline can be anything. Someone who comes up with excuses not to attend certain meetings may actually feel uncomfortable about participating. Or perhaps he or she feels ignored. We do not know what these issues are, nor can we guess where they come from. The only way to find out, is to go fishing for them. LDD gives us the tools to do this, they are discussed later on.

Further along the Resistance Line you will find **gossip**. We tend to think of gossip as something negative, but it is part of our everyday life. We all gossip from time to time, but our gossiping escalates when our views are not heard, or we are not given the chance to express them.

When gossip is the informal method of communication – meaning that people only share information or opinions behind the back of others – this is an obvious sign that your organisation or group is in a bad place.

Lobbying, trying to influence others before decision making takes place, belongs to this part of the Resistance Line as well. It takes place below the waterline and motives and information are not shared with everyone. >



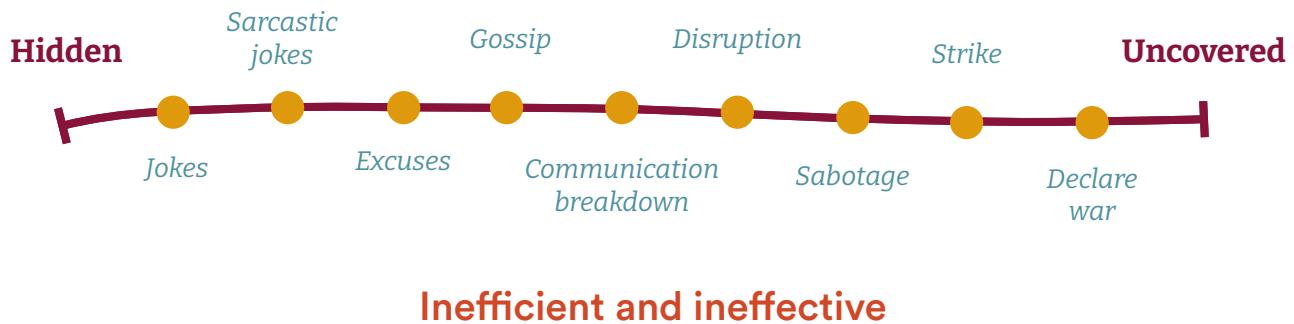
# WHAT HAPPENS ON THE WORKFLOOR

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“**S**ometimes workers ask for benefits beyond the minimum requirements by law. Those are what I call ‘headache issues’. Trade union and workers representatives submitted a proposal asking for money to cover lunch costs. There is no law telling a company to provide lunch for workers. But there are other factories that provide food and drink to workers. The unions learn about this and ask why our company cannot provide lunch incentives to workers like other factories do. Such a proposal is a must-solve matter. If I don't do anything, there might be a big problem, workers can go on strike. A proposal doesn't mean it has to be provided by the company. But it is very tough to reject workers' proposals.

*I need to handle them with care and make sure that was asked for will be given to workers. I'll know for sure the top management will respond in a surprised manner, saying the company is fully compliant. Why do workers keep asking for more? I need to explain politely to them that other factories also provide lunch incentives to their workers. I point out the difficulties of workers and explain why they ask for lunch. I need to point out the consequence of not giving the lunch incentive: workers might leave the factory and go to factories that do provide lunch incentives. We will have difficulties recruiting workers. Also, workers might not be happy and keep pushing for this.”*

HR manager in a garment factory

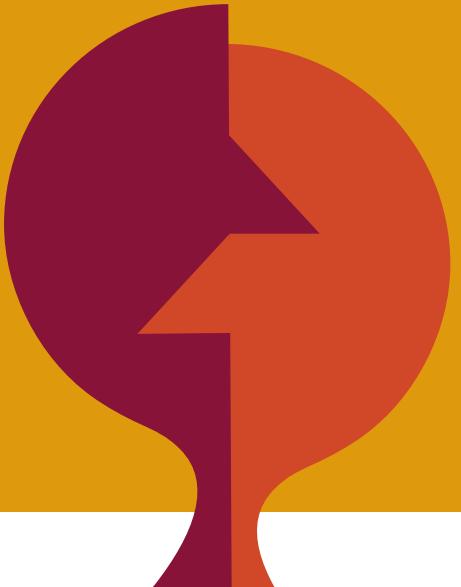


## Inefficient and ineffective

**Communication breakdowns** happen when people, groups or divisions stop talking to one another. A typical example is when someone writes emails or text messages to avoid a direct conversation. Or when department heads who don't get along, finally stop talking to each other and delegate communication to their personal assistants.

Progression down the Resistance Line leads to increased inefficiency and

ineffectiveness. This is clearly the case when gossip and communication breakdowns occur. They may not affect the operation and the profitability of a business immediately, but eventually they will. As the desire of the minority to be heard becomes more desperate, chances are that they will start to disrupt the process of the majority. Some people will even actively sabotage it by slowing down, creating bottlenecks and interfering with long-term goals. >



‘How groups make decisions shapes the kind of culture that they have and if people don’t feel heard, or safe to talk, they resist’

**MYRNA LEWIS**

One of the most common manifestations of **sabotage** is going slow. A lack of speed and a deliberate undermining of delivery reflects that a person, although doing his or her task, clearly does not want to do this. This go-slow action is a clear signal. People are also on a ‘go-slow’ if they think that any task can be put off until later. The sabotage phase may eventually develop into a **strike**. We are clearly now in uncovered resistance activity. If a lack of

response to strike behaviour persists, the minority’s voice still is not heard and the issue is sufficiently important to them, they will withdraw from the process altogether or, as a last resort, **declare war**.

**Lewis Deep Democracy can limit the progression of the Resistance Line. If used at the beginning of a group’s work together it can possibly prevent the Resistance Line from starting.**

# WHAT HAPPENS ON THE WORKFLOOR

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**“W**hen we had to change working days and holidays a while ago, management called for a meeting with the team leaders and supervisors. They explained that if production was late, the company would have to ship by air and that would cost a lot. That's why they asked us to move the holiday to another day. We understood, which is why we went along with it. However, there were some team leaders who weren't that happy with the request. The way they conveyed the message to their team was therefore different. For me, I explained the necessity to my team - especially in this year's situation. Because of Covid some factories have laid off their workers with 50% pay, some already closed down and some don't have enough work, so workers can only work until 4 pm. The management made a request, I think we should help and do it. With this kind of explanation, my team understands.”

Supervisor in a garment factory



## Cycling

Cycling is the second tool Lewis Deep Democracy uses to recognize conflict. Cycling indicates that unresolved issues are obstructing decisions or discussions in the group. When an issue or a certain kind of behaviour continues to present itself more than three times, we can say it 'cycles'. This is a red flag that indicates there is an issue below the waterline that needs to be resolved. Common topics for these kinds of discussions are transport services,

breaks or lunch time and toilet issues. Workers want to talk about these topics over and over, without showing that they really want to find a solution to their 'problem'. When this happens, chances are that these are 'safe topics' to complain about and there are other issues that do not feel safe to discuss in the open. Each time cycling takes place, an issue gains greater weight, requires more energy and becomes more difficult to resolve.



# WHAT HAPPENS ON THE WORKFLOOR

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**D**uring a factory visit we had started our session with a tour and were shown that people wrote nasty things in the toilets, including phone-numbers of women co-workers as if they were sex workers. I pointed out this kind of behaviour is not acceptable. But I also warned it is a symptom of some kind of frustration that exists in the organisation. The management could not figure this out. As the day progressed, another topic arose: in the canteen people threw their steel plates and steel bowls, which are fairly expensive to replace, in the garbage. I said: 'Any sign of destruction of property is a sign of some sort of subjugation they are not able to talk about. It may indicate that on the floor the supervisors may be harsh or something else is bothering them.' While we had designed a very different session for the day, we realised we needed to set that aside. We decided to address this issue in the group as soon as we started, and it was as if floodgates opened."

Facilitator







# How can you hear all the views to prevent conflict?

In group processes we often overlook  
the wisdom of the minority.

**T**o prevent conflict and make sure we hear all the voices in the room we use a tool from Lewis Deep Democracy that is called ‘four steps’. All the steps fall under the umbrella of meta-skills, which means that the attitude you bring to their practice is of great significance. For this tool, neutrality is one of the most important meta-skills. Neutrality is when you do not have a viewpoint (or do not bring it up) and you are not attached to an outcome.

### Step 1: Gain all the views

Genuinely open the floor to all the opinions. Give everyone the chance to have his or her say. This requires an unbiased listening attitude. Listen with full attention to all contributions. Be open and neutral. In situations where there is hierarchy and not everyone is empowered, speaking up can be difficult for individuals/a minority. To ensure that

all the different views are heard try to steer clear of **communication vices** (see p. 42).

### Step 2: Search for alternatives

Lewis Deep Democracy always tries to allow space for the ‘no’ or the alternative view to be expressed. As we share ideas, some proposals may emerge. It is tempting to go along with them and make quick decisions. But Lewis Deep Democracy requires something that is fundamentally different: you actively look for the alternative. You can do this by explicitly asking if someone would like to share a completely different idea or different perspective.

#### Be aware of the stare

Making sure the alternative view is heard is not always easy. When people are asked if they agree, they will often remain silent and stare at the person asking for agreement. This stare is often seen with >

people who have a history of being disempowered. Often the speaker, leader, chair or facilitator takes their silence as a ‘yes’. But in many cases, this is a misinterpretation of the silence. So instead of taking it as agreement, try to actively search for the ‘no’ or a different view.

### **Step 3: Make it safe to say ‘no’**

Eventually one brave person will say ‘no’ or share an alternative view. This person will be stating the dissenting opinion for other people who are silent in the room. By asking who can identify with them or can relate to their proposal you will ensure that this courageous person isn’t left alone. Encourage others to voice their different concerns or opinions. If, after a thorough exploration and repetition of these first three steps, it is clear there are a number of proposals, they are put to the vote (hands up). With a unanimous

majority, you put the proposal into practice. If the mood is very divided, go back to step 1 and ask everyone to make a good case for their different ideas to create more clarity about what the different options mean. Then you vote again. When there is a clear majority, you go to step 4.

### **Step 4: Add the wisdom of the minority**

In this step, you will address the people whose ideas didn’t make it and therefore lost their preferred vote. First, you recognize that their idea or request did not make it by saying: ‘I realise things didn’t turn out the way you wanted’. Then you ask them what additions or adjustments might be made to the majority decision that would help them to feel more okay with it. These changes can help the minority’s input to become part of the decision.

## THE UMBRELLA OF META-SKILLS

- 
- 1 Gain all the views
  - 2 Search for the alternative
  - 3 Make it safe to say 'no'
  - 4 Add the wisdom of the minority

# Communication vices

To resolve tension in a group, sound communication is vital. Be aware of the following communication vices that can create hurdles in the way.

## Not being present

This happens when your body is present but your mind has left the room, for instance when you are attending meetings, which may not be directly related to your sphere of influence. You may be physically present, but you are thinking about something else.

**+** **Antidote:** Ask a simple yes or no-question and take a hand-raising vote. This ensures that everyone is involved.

## Interruptions

Interruptions make it impossible to hear or be heard. If people are interrupting one another constantly, we often miss the point of what is said.

**+** **Antidote:** make people aware of the fact that they are interrupting and let them decide if they want to continue to do so. Some groups are perfectly fine with interruptions.

## Radio broadcasting

People sometimes express their views without relating them to what other people are saying. It is as if each person is having their own conversation, and this sounds like a collection of radios broadcasting their own programme with no connection to one another.

**+** **Antidote:** Try to encourage people to connect to what others are saying and not just leave the various threads hanging in space. Ask people for their views, specifically in relation to the last comment. >

## Indirect speaking

It is surprising how often we avoid direct exchanges by using vague references. We do this because we are afraid to offend someone or don't want to take responsibility for a point of view. This serves only to defer conflict temporarily and results in the person targeted feeling powerless and resentful. There are three common ways of being indirect.

- 1.** Not speaking from the 'I', but instead using the third person ("Some people may find that offensive" or "One should not do that").
- 2.** Speaking in general. Rather than expressing something directly, a person may say things about someone in the room but not address that person directly. For example, someone says: "I really think we should do something about the sales department" when Esther, who is a salesperson, is in the room.
- 3.** Angel winging. This means speaking on behalf of someone else, without giving them the chance

to do that themselves. Speaking on behalf of others contributes to their sense of disempowerment and dependency.

**+** **Antidote:** Make sure people speak for themselves. If someone speaks on behalf of someone else, ask the person directly for their own view and encourage them to speak for themselves.

## Sliding rather than deciding

Bad listening habits can often pull a conversation off track. Too often we have conversations that move onto totally different topics or change course without people consciously deciding.

**+** **Antidote:** Make sure that the group is conscious of what direction the discussion is taking. This will help participants decide what they really want to discuss and ensure that everyone is involved.

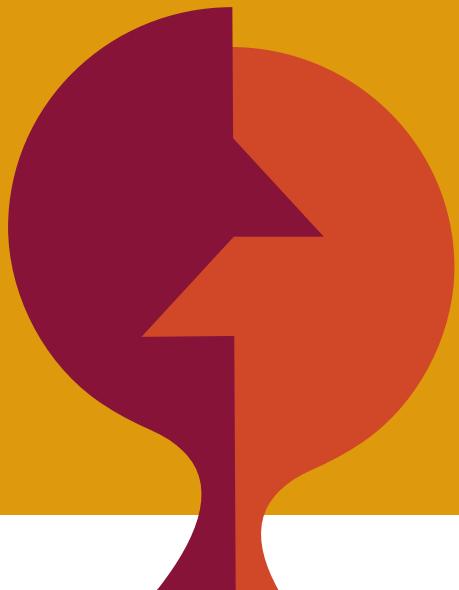
## Questions

We often use questions — especially in group settings — as a way of making a statement in a soft or cushioned way. These questions are not a genuine request for information, but statements wrapped up in questions.

**+** **Antidote:** To avoid this, gently challenge a question of that nature. Ask if the person is making a statement or if they really don't know.

‘It’s when conflict occurs that things get chaotic. When conflict occurs there’s also a growth opportunity’

**MYRNA LEWIS**







# What kind of leader are you in conflict situations?

There are three types of leaders that can guide their groups through conflict. Find out which one you are. First rate yourself on a scale from 1 to 10 on each (1 is minimum, 10 is maximum). Then ask yourself how others would rate you on being a neutral, clear or empathetic leader.



## 1. The Neutral Leader

- can have a view or purpose despite being neutral
- allows other views to be presented and then comments
- having heard all the views, prevents the Resistance Line
- enables better decision-making and wiser action
- is open to discussion
- can shift between neutrality and their opinions

## 2 The Leader with Clarity

- voices their opinion with clear intentions
- sets the playground or the boundaries and by doing so identifies the collective space (defining the subject and the purpose of the meeting)
- has a pace and orchestrates rather than letting discussions slide



## 3 The Empathetic and Compassionate Leader

- listens to understand, not to reply/convince or defend
- is in inquiry mode, rather than blaming, assuming or teaching
- accepts differences as they are, without judging or trying to change them
- doesn't act superior, but is respectful to all people

## Thoughts for your work

When you apply the methods in this manual, you will notice that more knowledge becomes available in the groups you work with, and that people feel more heard. They will find that their contribution is appreciated. This will eventually result in:

- better communication
- easier decision-making processes
- better relationships
- constructive cooperation in a nice working climate

The Lewis Deep Democracy method requires training and practice. Without meta-skills such as neutrality it will be difficult to facilitate a process. It is also important that you learn how to combine your leadership role with a facilitating role and make this transparent for the group you work with. The more familiar you are with these skills and roles, the easier the decision-making processes become. There will be less going back and forth once decisions are made. People won't feel ignored in the process of decision making because they have been heard. They have spoken out and their minority position was included in the majority decision.

## Recommended resources

- [lewisdeepdemocracy.com](http://lewisdeepdemocracy.com): general information and courses
- Mining the Gold of Conflict: Myrna Lewis' TED talk on Deep Democracy: [tedxcapetown.org/speakers/myrna-lewis](http://tedxcapetown.org/speakers/myrna-lewis)
- Deep Democracy's 3 levels: [youtube.com/watch?v=jW0ds0LMu5M](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jW0ds0LMu5M)
- *Sitting in the Fire, Large Group Transformation Using Conflict and Diversity*, Arnold Mindell
- *The Deep Democracy of Open Forums*, Arnold Mindell

# About the authors of this manual



## Cihan Koral

Cihan is an international facilitator and consultant. Her work focuses on the design and implementation of inclusive and emergent processes. She works on capacity building for civil society, gender, child labour, LGBTIQ+, immigration, conflict resolution, human rights and stakeholder engagement. As an accredited Deep Democracy instructor, Cihan works with approaches such as Theory U, SPT, Sociocracy, Art of Hosting and Non-Violent Communication. She works in partnerships to spread the Deep Democracy-principles through her initiative Por Muta (For the Mute), to hear all the silent voices. Cihan is also the co-founder of NGO Hasat, an organisation that tackles social problems by bringing an understanding of participation and interaction.



### **Idil Ander**

Idil is an international consultant and facilitator of workshops, sessions and meetings on human rights and working conditions. She has in-depth experience with improving working conditions of workers and ensuring human rights in the supply chain, stakeholder engagement and conflict resolution. She is an accredited Deep Democracy instructor and works with different tools and perspectives for change management such as Theory U, SPT, Art of Hosting and Non-Violent Communication. Idil is also a co-founder of Campus of Colors, an organisation that works on social inclusion of vulnerable groups.

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