UNIT 15 DIALOGUE AMONG PARTIES IN CONFLICT

Structure

15.1 INTRODUCTION

Prior to the industrial revolution, conflict and issues of contention were addressed in the form of town meetings, or under the auspices of councils before the public. Here all members of a community or society had the opportunity to voice their views or positions on the various issues affecting them. Our societies are no longer structured in this way and many of our social and political ideas, beliefs and hopes have no arenas in which to be expressed. This becomes particularly difficult, when those views are not in line with the conventional, applied doctrines that are prevalent in the culture. These views often become polarised against the mainstream, and become marginalised partly due to the lack of a forum in which they can be addressed.

Dialogues can be viewed as one means – if not the classical one – of dealing constructively with conflicts. As one popular formula puts it: "As long as you're talking, you cannot be shooting". "What better method is there of resolving a contentious issue", so runs another down-to-earth, commonsense observation, "than through an honest exchange of views?" "And", says discourse ethics, "what other way is there of finding lasting solutions to the numerous political-cum-moral conflicts in an interdependent and pluralistic world, than through "practical discourse between the affected parties" (Apel, 1990).

David Matthews in his introduction to the study Citizens and Politics (1991) argues that citizens long to restore the integrity and vitality of public discussion and realise that in

order to participate in the governance of society, they must take part in open discussion, both among themselves and with public officials. He asserts that public dialogue is the natural home for democratic politics. He maintains that citizens want forums which encourage free and open discussion in which their concerns can be listened to. Let us, in this unit, have a look on the process and utility of dialogue.

Aims and Objectives

After studying this Unit, you will be able to :

- know the meaning and concept of dialogue;

- understand characteristics and classifications of dialogue;

- distinguish between debate and dialogue; and

- appreciate the importance of dialogue among parties in conflict.

15.2   WHAT IS DIALOGUE?

Dialogue is an open-ended communication between conûict parties that is facilitated or moderated by a third party, in order to foster mutual recognition, understanding, empathy and trust. It is differently organised and includes images or "encodements" (*symbols*) and their interpretations (*meanings*) transmitted from past generations (traditions), contemporaries, and formed by the individuals themselves (*modern*). It is constructive engagement between two or more parties to forge a mutually acceptable solution to a problem. It involves informed conversation and communication on a specific issue with the aims of developing mutual trust, forging cooperation, and devising concerted action to address an issue of contention or conflict.

The word dialogue is a combination of the two Greek words: *dia*, meaning "through," and *logos*, interpreted as "word or meaning." To engage in dialogue is therefore to engage in making meaning through the spoken/written word (Maranhao 1990, 276).

Hence dialogue, as Anderson, Cissna and Arnett, point out, is a speech across, between, or through. Within contemporary literature there appear to be four conceptions of dialogue:

- Dialogue as a form of human meeting or relationship

- Dialogue as the study of the intricacies of human conversation

- Dialogue as a cultural form of human knowing

- Dialogue as a means of understanding and interpreting text.

Dialogue is a specific type of conflict intervention strategy. It is grounded in conflict resolution through controlled communication by the conflict parties. Dialogue is an open-ended communication between conflict parties that is facilitated or moderated by a third party, in order to foster mutual recognition, understanding, empathy and trust. The goal of dialogue is usually simply improving interpersonal understanding and trust (Conflict Research Consortium – CRH).

Becker, Chasin, Chasin, Herzig and Roth (1991) talk of dialogue as an exchange of perspectives, experiences and beliefs in which people speak and listen openly and

respectfully. Participants speak as unique individuals about their own beliefs and experiences, reveal their uncertainties as well as certainties, and try to understand one another. As people in dialogue listen to each other, relationship shifts often occur and differences between people become less frightening. Old patterns of retaliation lose their appeal as the experience of dialogue leaves people feeling listened to and respected, rather than beaten and embittered, or victorious and braced for backlash.

15.3 CHARACTERISTICS OF DIALOGUE

According to Anderson (1994) the characteristics of dialogue, are seen as multifold. They include:

a)   immediacy of presence;

b)   emergent unanticipated consequences;

c)   recognition of unknown otherness;

d)   a collaborative orientation;

e)   genuineness and

f)   authenticity.

15.4 CLASSIFICATION OF DIALOGUE

The recent literature gives particular attention to two ways of classifying dialogues: First, the identification of ideal types of dialogue and, second, the differentiation of phases according to the typical steps of interaction and communication which constitute a constructive process of dialogue. Jay Rothman (1998) has proposed classifying approaches to dialogue in inter-group conflicts into three or four ideal types:

Whether the commonest form of interchange actually merits the name dialogue is doubtful: in a *positional dialogue* the parties articulate their respective views – which may range from differing to diametrically oppose – as positions and attitudes that merely require acknowledgement. As in a parliamentary debate, communication serves primarily to score points, as one argument is set against the other.

In the case of *human-relations dialogue* the differences of opinion on the substantive issues are relegated to a secondary place and work is instead done at the relational level, focusing on the causes of misunderstandings and the stereotypes which typically arise between the parties. These kinds of dialogues are often preceded by preparatory training sessions on basic mechanisms of perception and interaction in groups. The objectives are mutual acknowledgement of the person and increased respect by each party for the other. What impact this might have in terms of the substance of the conflict is an open question.

Activist dialogue goes one step further. The subjects at issue are sorted and analysed in order to identify common ground, and/or to explore how the parties might contain their dispute through joint action.

The most ambitious approach is the *problem-solving dialogue,* in which the disputants organise their communication in such a way that they are able to systematically work through the substance of their differences. Where conflicts are highly escalated, this kind

of dialogue will generally require the presence of a third party as a co-actor – or indeed as an initiator.

15.4.1   The Phases

These approaches are more than just a useful way of classifying dialogues according to their prevailing forms of interaction. Taken together, they also emphasize different yet complementary elements of dealing constructively with conflicts through dialogue. In a modified form, one can also conceptualise the different types of dialogues as steps in a process of enhancing the quality of communication and interaction between the dialogue partners as shown in Figure 15.1. Adherents of the Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) Movement have put forward a template of four phases for responding to conflicts through communication:

- The first phase is concerned with formulating the *differing points of view* of the various parties as clearly as possible, securing mutual acknowledgement of these, as well as identifying the substance of the conflict.

- The focus in the second phase is on reflection on the underlying needs and fears of the participating actors, their values, their experiences of conflict and their hopes. Ideally, it should also be possible, in this phase, to develop approaches for securing personal acknowledgement of and insight into the conflicting biographies of the other side.

- The third phase is devoted to the identification of shared *interests* and similar *needs and fears*. It can also be aimed at the initiation of practical cooperation on less controversial issues.

- In most cases the fourth phase requires a lengthy period of preparation, and also personal confidence-building. It involves discussing approaches and ideas for *addressing the substantive issues in dispute,* reflecting on how these approaches and ideas might be implemented and then *initiating practical measures for their resolution.*

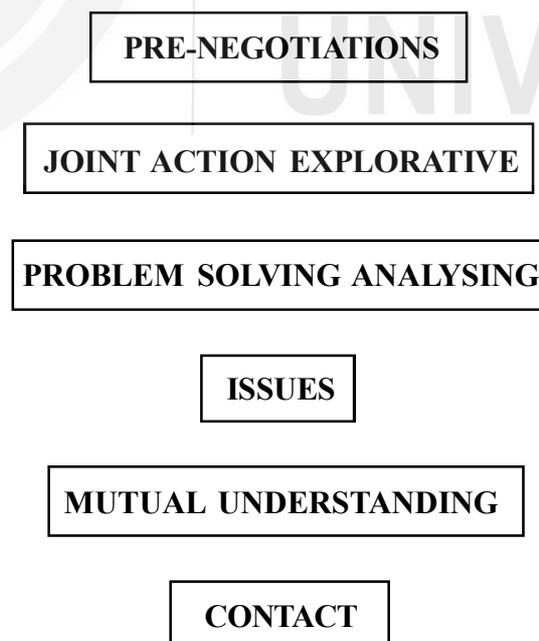<div align="center">

PRE-NEGOTIATIONS

JOINT ACTION EXPLORATIVE

PROBLEM SOLVING ANALYSING

ISSUES

MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING

CONTACT

</div>

Figure 15.1: Levels of Cooperation in Dialogue Processes

Source: McCartney 1986

In the case of protracted conflicts, dialogues between disputing groups will often be structured as a series of dialogue events, sometimes extending over a period of many months or even years. Several models help to conceptualise constructive developments for such a series of events. One of these focuses especially on the character of the relationship between the parties and the success of the joint efforts as the key characteristics, thus interpreting progress as a process of relationship building, problem solving and collaborative action. This according to McCartney includes:

- Contact and confidence building;

- Empathy for the other side;

- Joint analysis of conflict issues;

- Explorative problem solving;

- Joint activities in the possibility that the dialogue might feed into official negotiations or pre-negotiations.

15.4.2 Organised Group Encounters

Most dialogues take the form of *organised group encounters* of a size that allows face-to- face communication. They are usually conducted with persons below top leadership-level. They are therefore not so much official negotiations as a form of political preliminaries. As a rule, responsibility for the initiation, organisation, and direction of the meetings is assumed by a third party. This third party need not come from outside the country; it can also consist of moderate individuals from inside the conflict region.

In the case of highly escalated disputes, or in divided societies, organising a peaceful coming- together will be difficult, with interveners often finding themselves unable to successfully get through even the first phase. In the case of protracted conflicts, several meetings will likely be necessary, and interveners must always allow for the possibility of slipping back to an earlier phase. The need for time, as well as the general fragility of the process, demand from the organisers of dialogue projects a great deal of persistence, as well as a compelling long-term vision and the necessary resources.

The basic idea behind dialogue-based meetings is not new. It was given its initiation in post-1945 Europe, in the context of the paradigm of international intercultural understanding. Then, the prime target group was young people. What drove the endeavour was the conviction that increased contact and interaction between individuals from different backgrounds could help eliminate prejudices and enemy images and create trans-frontier loyalties. Since then, this fairly naïve, contact hypothesis 'has been supplanted by more sophisticated concepts of intercultural learning'(Otten/Treuheit, 1994).

Dialogue-based meetings intended expressly to deal with ethno-political conflicts are a more recent phenomenon, but they draw on similar beliefs. Probably the most influential school of instruction in these methods is the 'interactive conflict-resolution' or 'interactive problem-solving' movement (Mitchell and Banks 1996). The roots of this approach go back to the 1960s, when various scholar/practitioners began to invite influential representatives of conflicting parties to workshops, in order either to then guide them through the above-mentioned four phases of constructive dialogue in a quasi-academic exercise, or to facilitate this process. Experience with the use of this approach has now been gathered in a number of different crisis regions.

15.5 INTRODUCTION OF DIALOGUE

After understanding the meaning, characteristics, classification and different phases of dialogue, it is very important to understand the importance of dialogue. It is an *inclusive process*. Dialogue brings together a diverse set of voices to create a microcosm of the larger society. To bring about sustainable change, people have to develop a sense of joint ownership of the process and become stakeholders in identifying new approaches to address common challenges.

- It *entails learning, not just talking*. The process is not just about sitting around a table, but changing the *way* people talk, think and communicate with one another. Unlike other forms of discussion, dialogue requires self-reflection, spirit of inquiry and personal change to be present. Parties' willingness to address the root causes of a crisis, not just the symptoms on the surface. For instance, the 1979 Camp David accords between Egypt and Israel may have ended the armed conflict, but arguably created no qualitative "below-the-waterline" difference in the relationship between their people. That is, there was peace (understood as the absence of violence) but no personal change (which would lead to genuine and sustainable peace).

- *Recognizes one another's humanity*. Parties must be willing to show empathy toward one another, recognize differences as well as areas of common ground, and demonstrate a capacity for change. To foster this kind of human interaction, a respectful and neutral setting – or "safe space" – is preferred.

- *Dialogue stresses a long-term perspective.* Other forms of conversation tend to focus on the symptoms rather than the root causes of problems. To find sustainable solutions requires time and patience. The process can be painstakingly slow and incremental, lasting anywhere from ten minutes to ten years—one-off interventions very often do not work to address deeply-rooted causes of conflict or to fully deal with complex issues.

Internal division makes external accommodation between conflict parties more difficult. So this is the starting point. The strategic engagement of discourses begins, not with external dialogue *between* conflict parties, but with inclusive dialogue *within* them.

Inclusive internal dialogue is not *hermeneutic* (mutual understanding with the other), but *strategic* (how to win). Full account is taken of the systemic complexity of the conflict environment, but the aim is to determine whether there can be a coherent national plan, how the internal unity required to formulate and execute it is to be attained, and what the most effective resulting strategy will be. This is another reason why such dialogue can survive when other forms of communication break-down.

15.6 DEBATE VS DIALOGUE

The difference between debate and dialogue is the process by which a person(s) communicates. Debate is about proving your opponent wrong, while dialogue is more about expressing a viewpoint and trying to get your opponent to agree. In both cases you are trying to get someone to agree with you, but the method is diûerent. Dialogue may not produce as much heat as debate, but it generates a great deal more light.

Dialogue	Debate
Dialogue is collaborative: two or more sides work together toward a common understanding.	Debate is oppositional: two sides oppose each other and attempt to prove each other wrong.
In dialogue, finding common ground is the goal.	In debate, winning is the goal.
In dialogue, one listens to the other side(s) in order to understand, find meaning and find agreement.	In debate, one listens to the other side in order to find flaws and to counter its arguments.
Dialogue enlarges and possibly changes a participant's point of view.	Debate affirms a participant's own point of view
Dialogue reveals assumptions for re-evaluation.	Debate defends assumptions as truth.
Dialogue causes introspection on one's own position.	Debate causes critique of the other position.
Dialogue opens the possibility of reaching a better solution than any of the original solutions.	Debate defends one's own positions as the best solution and excludes other solutions.
Dialogue creates an open-minded attitude: openness to being wrong and an openness to change.	Debate creates a close-minded attitude, a determination to be right.
In dialogue, one submits one's best thinking, knowing that other people's reflections will help improve it rather than destroy it.	In debate, one submits one's best thinking and defends it against challenge to show that it is right.
Dialogue calls for temporarily suspending one's beliefs in order to be receptive to other points of view.	Debate calls for investing wholeheartedly in one's beliefs.
In dialogue, one searches for basic agreements.	In debate, one searches for glaring differences.
In dialogue, one searches for strengths in the other positions.	In debate one searches for flaws and weaknesses in the other position.
Dialogue involves a real concern for the other person and seeks to not alienate or offend.	Debate involves a countering of the other position without focusing on feelings or relation- ships and often belittles or deprecates the other person.
Dialogue assumes that many people have pieces of the answer and that together they can put them into a workable solution.	Debate assumes that there is a right answer and that someone has it.
Dialogue remains open-ended.	Debate implies a conclusion.

The parties to a dialogue aim not to defeat one another, but to enlighten one another. It is not a conûict, but a shared inquiry. In contrast to the debater's zero-sum game, in which every victory must be accompanied by a loss, dialogue permits both parties to emerge from their discussion enriched. Both can beneût from a shared pursuit of enlightenment.

15.7 METHODS OTHER THAN DIALOGUE

Blake and Mouton presented five general techniques for resolving conflict: withdrawing, smoothing, forcing, compromising, and collaborating/confronting/ problem solving (to as negotiating).

Withdrawing involves avoiding, denying, giving up, pulling out, or retreating and as such constitutes a refusal to deal with the conflict by ignoring it as much as possible. This style is appropriate when a cooling-off period is needed to gain better understanding of the conflict situation and also when the other party is both unassertive and uncooperative. Withdrawal, a passive, stopgap way of handling conflict, generally fails to solve the problem. Smoothing, or accommodating, is an appeasing approach of emphasizing areas of agreement while avoiding points of disagreement. It is appropriate to keep harmony and avoid outwardly conflictive situations. It works when the issues are more important than the personal positions and aspirations of the parties involved. Since smoothing tends to keep peace only in the short term, it fails to provide a permanent long-term solution to the undying conflict. Generally conflict reappears again in another form.

Both *smoothing* and withdrawing incline toward ignoring or delaying tactics, which do not resolve conflict but will temporarily slow down the situation.

Forcing implies the use of position power and dominance to resolve the conflict. It involves imposing one viewpoint at the expense of another and is characterised by a win-lose outcome in which one party overwhelms the other. Forcing is used when there is no common ground on which to bargain or negotiate and when both parties are uncooperative and strong-willed.

Forcing usually takes less time than compromise and negotiation, but it leaves hard feelings because people dislike having others' views imposed on them. Conflict resolved by force may develop again and haunt the enforcer at a later date. Although forcing definitely resolves the conflict quickly, it should be used only as a last resort.

Compromising is primarily bargaining: receiving something in exchange for something else. It involves considering various issues, bargaining, using trade-off negotiations, and searching for solutions that bring some degree of satisfaction to both parties. Neither party wins, but both get some satisfaction out of the situation. Both may temporarily feel hurt because they had to give up something that was important to them, but compromising usually provides acceptable solutions. A definitive resolution to the conflict is achieved when a compromise is reached and accepted as a just solution by both parties.

Collaborating is an effective technique to manage conflicts when a situation is too important to be compromised. It involves incorporating multiple ideas and viewpoints from people with different perspectives. It offers a good opportunity to learn from others. Active collaboration by both parties in contributing to the resolution makes it easier to get their consensus and commitment. Collaboration is not very effective when more than a few players are involved and their viewpoints are mutually exclusive.

Look for Win-Win Alternatives. Of the interpersonal conflict resolution styles, confronting (negotiating and problem solving) is the most effective approach because it starts with an understanding by both parties that they must search for solutions that satisfy everyone. Creation of a cooperative and assertive environment is must to achieve win-win solutions. These guidelines may be useful:

● *Do the doable.* Must be able to evaluate the situation and spend their efforts and energy in doing only whatever is really possible. "It's no use in trying to teach ducks to sing; it will only frustrate you and confuse the ducks!"

● *Build on earlier market analyses.* Using the strategy of only doing the doable, an earlier analysis of situations to give some insight into the conditions that would meet the other party's criteria for a win-win solution.

● *Use the assertive model* Build on the strengths of all parties while minimizing their weaknesses. Building mutual understanding and trust will help in reaching a win-win solution.

● *Look at things right side up.* It is a mistake to assume that the person is the problem and therefore start attacking the person instead of the problem.

● *Avoid catastrophizing.* It leads to lower team morale and confidence, increased frustration, and possibly failure. Some of the common catastrophizing remarks that describe inconvenience, difficulty, or frustration are: "This is going to be a disaster." "We will never get this done on time."

● *Picture things going well.* Visualize and imagine positive results. It is difficult to move onto something better without knowing what "better" is. (using a problem-solving approach).(House, 1988)

● *Identify priorities and verbalize them.* Priorities rank highly as a source of conflict. Sometimes people compromise so much in a conflict that no one wins, and everyone is dissatisfied. Evaluate the priorities up front and identify the "must haves" and "nice to haves." While resolving conflicts, he or she may compromise on "nice to haves" in order of importance. (Sieved, 1986)

15.8 INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE FOR TRANSFORMATION/ PREVENTION

In this process, the parties change the patterns of conflict. They change the structure and the system that were conducive to the emergence of disagreement. The goal is integration of all concerns and interests into a new paradigm. This integrative approach goes beyond a mere win in. The end result is greater than the sum of the component parts. Europe's post World War II era is a good example of preventing war between Germany and France through the integration of the ingredients of military industry, in the framework of the Steel and Coal European Community. Intercultural dialogue shifts the focus of the process from achieving a cessation of hostilities or negative peace to addressing the causes of structural and cultural violence or positive peace.

Actually, culture can read the situation through the prism of the actor of a conflict. This actor is primarily concerned with the data helping him deal with the day to day issues on the ground. He tries to identify all relevant details and the subtleties of language that are

the key to understanding the precise scope of words used, and to encoding the behaviour and attitudes of the others. This is case study approach. Culture can also seek to build categories that could be used in different situations across different cases. The idea is to determine the most salient parameters of culture in order to integrate them into a quantitative analysis. In using both approaches, the actor perspective and the categorization tool, one should avoid falling into the trap of reducing diversity, forcing homogeneity, assuming stability of dimensions of culture, and potentially, dictate some determinism of the behaviour of individuals and groups. In order to avoid such oversimplification, a balanced combination of the case study approach and the category approach tries to organise the issue into categories before addressing the specifics of the case studied. Henceforth, the risk taking by the Youth is peculiar of dynamic societies, but then to determine the price this category is going to pay depends on the precise socio economic and political context framing the specific perceptions of the actors.

15.9 SUMMARY

Civilians too often grow frustrated by endless rounds of talks without concrete actions. That being said, the trend in international affairs points toward more dialogue, not less. "The challenge therefore is obvious," wrote Jonas Gahr Støre, Norway's foreign affairs minister, "to capitalize on the respect for dialogue by working to ensure that mediators and others involved are as well equipped as possible to deliver effective and long-lasting results."

The number of violent conflicts has declined in recent years as the willingness of government s, international organisations, and other actors to engage in dialogue has reached higher levels. That is no accident. To transform societies and find real solutions to the world's most complex challenges—from violent conflict to poor governance, human rights abuses to uneven development, environmental degradation to eradicating HIV/ AIDS—requires new approaches. If hearts and minds in South Africa and Northern Ireland can come unhardened, then the possibilities are endless. Take it from Albert Einstein, who correctly noted that "problems cannot be solved by the same level of thinking that created them."

Deep dialogue between parties in conflict can go a long way to helping bridge the gap between intentions, words and deeds. In the "Sayings of the Fathers" it is written that a hero is one who transforms an enemy in to a friend. This is the art of peacemaking. Such transformation can occur in deep dialogue when conflicting sides' are able to clearly state what is important to them and why and further, after careful listening, articulate the other side's core values, hopes and fears as they have heard them. A rhetorically simple but potentially profoundly powerful question at the core of deep dialogue, ideally asked of participants to one another, is "Why do you care so much? Why does this matter to you so deeply?"

The dialogical approach to conflict can provide disputants with the opportunity to both clarify their own deeply held needs and values and to the other as at least partially similar to themselves. It can help to "unfreeze" opponents' assumptions that the other is an eternal enemy to be destroyed at best, or at least forever constrained and contained. It enables parties to see that adversaries, like the self, are deeply motivated by shared

human needs and values and that unless these are fulfilled, antagonism and even violence will be perpetuated.

Thus, as disputants more clearly articulate what they mean and explore together how to act consistently, new possibilities for viewing their conflict in inclusive terms emerges as a rigid "us/them" split recedes. Parties may begin to see that "we" are in this conflict dynamic together and only together can we get out of it. Thus enemies may truly become allies and eventually friends.

15.10   TERMINAL QUESTIONS

1)   What is the importance of dialogue among parties in conflict?

2)   Discuss in brief the classification of dialogue.

3)   Describe the importance of dialogue in conflict settlement.

4)   Elaborate methods other than dialogue.

5)   What do you understand by Intercultural dialogue?

SUGGESTED READINGS

Anderson, R., Cissna, K.N. and Arnett, R.C. (eds.), (1994) *The Reach of Dialogue: Confirmation, Voice and Community* (New Jersey: Hampton Press).

Apel, Karl-Otto, (1990) *Diskurs und Verantwortung* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp).

Baker, S., & Baker, K., (1992) *On Time/On Budget: A Step By Step Guide For Managing Any Project* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall).

"Bringing Iraqis to the Table," The Boston Globe (April 25, 2008). http://www.boston.com/news/nation/articles/2008/04/25/bringing_iraqis_to_the_table

'Glossary', Conflict Research Consortium (CRH) - University of Colorado, US, available at http://www.beyondintractability.org/resources/glossary.jsp?nid=5098.)

House, R. S., (1988) *The Human Side of Project Management* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley).

Maranhao, T. (ed.), (1990) *The Interpretation of Dialogue*, (Illinois: The University of Chicago Press).

McCartney, Clem, (1986) "Human Rights Education," in *11th Annual Report. Standing Advisory Committee on Human Rights,* (London: HMSO).

Mitchell, Christopher & Michael Banks, (1996) *Handbook of Conflict Resolution: The Analytical Problem-Solving Approach* (London: Pinter).

Otten, Hendrik & Werner Treuheit, (1994) *Interkulturelles Lernen in Theorie und Praxis: Ein Handbuch für Jugendarbeit und Weiterbildung,* (Opladen: Leske und Budrich).

Richard Chasin, Margaret Herzig, Sallyann Roth, Laura Chasin, Carol Becker, and Robert Stains, Jr., (1996) "From Diatribe to Dialogue on Divisive Public Issues: Approaches Drawn from Family Therapy," *Mediation Quarterly* 13:4 (Summer 1996), pp. 323-344.

Sieved, R. W, Jr., (1986) "Communication: An Important Construction Tool", *Project Management Journal*, p. 77.

Verma, V. K., (1996) *Human Resource Skills for the Project Manager* (Upper Darby, PA: Project Management Institute), p. 122.