

Communologue: safe communication can help bring peace to the world



As violence continues to devastate lives in many corners of the world, a major effort is underway to use the Communologue process to resolve conflicts.

By Donald Gibbon

Soon after 9/11, the Imago Annual Conference was held in Atlanta. The tragedy was on everyone's minds. Many at the Conference were now searching for a new and effective way to make a difference in the world through their Imago work. The Imago Peace Project grew out of this longing. A few committed individuals signed up to create some way to make this desire gel into a useable structure. The daunting needs made choosing a focus of energies a major issue. Change the world through Imago - Wow!

With persistence the core group held together for six years. The personnel have shifted with time and leadership has changed, yet a consistent and uniform product has emerged. The group decided to transform the central Imago tool, the Couple's Dialogue, into a tool for "safe group communication." This new tool came to be called "Communologue." Its purpose is to allow groups of individuals to speak honestly and openly to exchange perspectives with one another when prior circumstances might give them great reluctance to do so. The process would assure that speakers would be truly listened to and that they would be safe in their speaking.

Codifying the Communologue process, in much the same way that the Couple's Dialogue has been reduced to a single page of instructions, has proven very difficult. A page-long set of Norms and Guidelines has been created to help participants get in the spirit of the process and to understand what actions help assure success. Yet the core requirement for success has been found to be a trained facilitator, someone who has experience in guiding the process, who helps the participants apply the Norms and Guidelines as they venture out into the scary new discourse with each other.

Getting to this point has taken an enormous amount of time and commitment of finances and energy. There have been long and frequent conference calls as well many cross-country flights for face-to-face meetings. Members have repeatedly visited each other's homes in places as widely separated as Israel and Idaho to work on product development. As members found occasion and opportunity they would set up Communologues with groups in their own areas; a sort of self-designed "beta testing" operation, after which they would report back to

the Peace Project members on what they had learned from the experience. A web site has been created to archive much of this activity and share it with anyone who wants to learn about this exciting work (<http://imagepeaceproject.org>).

Communologue has been demonstrated repeatedly at national and international conferences. It is used as the norm for communication at IRI gatherings. Far-flung training opportunities have been offered for all who want to learn how to become facilitators. The search for something solid and well-defined hasn't produced a simple "object." Instead Communologue is a different experience in the hands of different trainers and facilitators. There are many ways of handling "safe group communication," all built around the core Dialogue concepts of sending and receiving, "empathy, respect, and authenticity," mirroring and validation.

However, a few things in Communologue are held as constants: the group must be seated in a circle so that there is no physical sense of hierarchy, words are spoken to the whole group (not to or between individuals), and each speaker is to stick to one subject at a time and be brief. The facilitator senses the needs, dynamics, and capabilities of the group and adjusts the process to fit what appears to be appropriate. Consider mirroring: the person mirroring should not be the next speaker. This is to prevent the misuse of mirroring to get the microphone for oneself.

There are situations in which it is appropriate to have speakers express themselves sequentially around the circle. For instance, sometimes a specific topic is being addressed, and sometimes only a general theme is defined. Sometimes validation and empathy are important, sometimes they are not included. An over-all time limit is most likely necessary so the process has a defined end point. The facilitator may have some closing ceremony to bring a final note of harmony and respect to the process. Clearly much depends on the facilitators and the Peace Project membership has included quite a number of them.

Communologues have been held in many countries where there are Imago therapists. Training has gone out to countries as widespread as Argentina and New Zealand, Sweden and South Africa. A major long-term project has taken place in Israel between Palestinian and Israeli couples. An especially memorable four-day Couples Workshop and Communologue was held in Istanbul. A powerful session was held in Vienna in October 2007 between Jews and Austrians. Enlisted men and their non-commissioned officers have been brought into greater harmony in a National Guard unit in Idaho. Rwandan Hutus and Tutsis have communicated safely at the UN in New York City. Teachers, administrators, and teen-aged students have improved understanding in a school in Rhode Island. And to our great pleasure, members of one of our Imago associate groups are talking more openly to each other again.

Communologue is a proven process, created by the remarkable dedication of a group of committed volunteers. They want to apply the process wherever need exists: in PTAs, in boardrooms, in union shops, in political parties, between traditional enemies, in families, and more. The places where Communologue can be helpful are only limited by the capacity of the human mind to develop misunderstandings. Safe communication can help bring peace to the world. You can help by finding places to apply Communologue and letting us know your desire to use it. We will try to help you do just that. Contact <http://imagepeaceproject.org>