

## SUMMARY OF CORE SKILLS FOR CONFLICT WORK

### *Core Skill 1: Research Skills*

**Summary:** This skill concerns the ability to wade through large amounts of information and pick out what is really important and relevant to the job at hand. It includes the ability to store and retrieve useful information as well as to catalogue, summarise and organise information appropriately to requirements.



**Importance:** Most organisations working in conflict expect a certain degree of knowledge on a whole range of topics relevant to the work at hand. But what is crucial is not so much the knowledge itself as the ability to *get* the knowledge, as and when it is needed.

**Background knowledge required:** Research techniques; speed reading; mind maps; sources of information; note-taking; summarising; outlining; general knowledge; advanced knowledge in specialist subjects; mnemonic techniques

**Range of relevant experience:** researching information for briefing someone else, for making a presentation, for writing a report; researching a familiar topic, an unknown topic, a complex and difficult topic; researching through books, journals, reports, internet search, primary source material, internal documents.

### **Vocational standards:**

#### Level 1 – able to find information from a variety of sources

- 1.1 able to identify relevant sources of information
- 1.2 able to find basic information as required

#### Level 2 – able to identify what is important and be able to summarise it

- 2.1 able to identify key points from a relevant passage or source
- 2.2 able to produce an outline
- 2.3 able to produce a summary of key points

#### Level 3 – able to be given a topic, find out about it and be able to speak on it

- 3.1 able to use mnemonic techniques to retain relevant details
- 3.2 able to skim read large documents and pick out what is relevant
- 3.3 able to search out relevant sources of information on a given topic and produce report

#### Level 4 – able to research a complex topic and brief others appropriately

- 4.1 able to receive complex research specification, find and read background documents and produce relevant briefing at the appropriate level
- 4.2 able to catalogue and organise information via a database or other filing system
- 4.3 able to identify research objectives and set realistic targets for achieving them

#### Level 5 – able to identify a research need and direct a team to produce a briefing

- 5.1 able to produce a research specification and assign research tasks to complete it
- 5.2 able to oversee research team in production of a complex research report

**Core Skills for conflict Work: Core Skill 2: Written Communication**

**Summary of skill:** This involves the ability to write well. Although writing ability is best demonstrated in one's native language, most international organisations now require all documentation in English. Non-native English speakers are clearly at a disadvantage here, but must nevertheless demonstrate an ability to write reports in English. The exact style and format of writing that may be required will vary, but the emphasis here is on being able to write factual reports that are clear, concise and accurate.



**Importance:** Being able to write clear and concise reports, appropriate in length, style and format for the intended audience, is a basic requirement of white collar work in almost any environment. It is a crucial skill in conflict settings, because so much depends upon the reporting mechanisms that pass information to and from the field as well as on the accurate and timely nature of those information flows. Written communication skills appropriate to a field mission setting include writing of incident reports, field reports and executive summaries of longer documents.

**Background knowledge required:** Types and formats of reports required; executive summaries; English grammar and punctuation rules; technical report-writing; grant-writing; logframes.

**Range of relevant experience:** Different types of reports: progress reports, evaluation reports, drafting terms of reference, incident reports, field reports, technical reports; funding reports and applications, logframes; writing a report, editing, design and layout, presenting a report; formats required for UN, OSCE, Council of Europe, EU

**Vocational standards:** (N.B. These standards refer to abilities in one's mother tongue, although in many cases assessment will be based on written ability in English)

Level 1 – able to write coherently

1.1 able to write coherently and legibly

Level 2 – able to write clear, concise and accurate reports

2.1 able to write using correct spelling, grammar and syntax

2.2 writing is simple, clear and accurate

Level 3 – able to write in a style appropriate to a given audience and purpose

3.1 able to use appropriate format for type of writing

3.2 able to use appropriate language and style for intended audience

3.3 able to clearly express and communicate facts and ideas with impact

Level 4 – able to edit to a given length and style within a given timeframe

4.1 able to produce clear and concise executive summaries to longer documents

4.2 able to edit someone's else writing to a given style and length

4.3 able to produce reports and other documents in the required timescale

Level 5 – able to initiate and oversee collaborative writing projects

5.1 able to assign writing tasks, edit and collate these to achieve desired result

5.2 able to oversee editing process to ensure consistency of style and format among editors

**Core Skills for Conflict Work: Core Skill 3: Verbal Communication**

**Summary of skill:** This involves the ability to communicate effectively with other people, whether on a one-to-one basis, with a group or in front of an audience. Communication means being able to articulate what one wants to say, being aware of messages being communicated with one's body language, being able to elicit responses from people and being able to listen to what they have to say.



**Why this skill is important:** Verbal communication skills are a basic requirement in many settings, from sales to teaching to management. In a conflict context these refer especially to the ability to get across messages effectively to a very wide variety of audiences, from a local mayor or dignitary to an audience of journalists or academics. Rather than developing presentation techniques as such, the emphasis here is on the ability to communicate effectively in strange and difficult environments.

**Background knowledge required:** Understand the risks for effective teamwork inherent in poor communications; basic communication theory; principles of active listening; presentation techniques; body language and non-verbal behaviour; emotional intelligence theory

**Range of relevant experience:** Dialogue; group discussions; presentations; interviews; active listening; negotiations

**Vocational standards:****Level 1 – able to establish rapport and communicate with strangers**

- 1.1 able to articulate and put across a clear and concise message
- 1.2 able to engage in two-way conversation with stranger
- 1.3 aware of own non-verbal behaviour

**Level 2 – able to listen attentively and display congruent non-verbal behaviour**

- 2.1 able to display non-verbal behaviour appropriately
- 2.2 able to convey interest and attentiveness through active listening
- 2.3 able to communicate emotions appropriately

**Level 3 – able to speak effectively in front of an audience and elicit responses**

- 3.1 able to elicit responses from an audience
- 3.2 able to use humour appropriately
- 3.3 able to communicate a message effectively and persuasively

**Level 4 – able to communicate effectively in difficult situations**

- 4.1 able to use paraphrasing, summarising and questioning techniques to enhance listening
- 4.2 able to communicate assertively
- 4.3 able to give constructive criticism and effective feedback

**Level 5 – able to deal effectively with difficult and awkward people**

- 5.1 able to communicate effectively with people not willing or able to communicate well
- 5.2 able to communicate effectively in situations of high tension and stress

**Core Skills for Conflict Work: Core Skill 4: Self-Management**

**Summary of skill:** Self-management is first of all about the ability to see yourself as others may see you: your own strengths and weaknesses, attitudes, prejudices, response mechanisms to stress and conflict. Self-management is also about being able to respond positively to feedback and criticism, to be able to learn from our own mistakes as well as from those of others. Ultimately it is about planning and organising our time and work lives so as to maximise personal effectiveness.



**Why this skill is important:** Being aware of what is going on around you is of vital importance for your own safety as well as your effectiveness in dealing with a conflict situation. But awareness of your own behaviour and how you are responding to different situations can be just as important. Self-management skills underpin other core skills such as cultural sensitivity and communication skills and are fundamental to effective and competent work in this field.

**Background knowledge required:** Basic approaches to understanding and differentiating personality types, management and leadership styles, coping mechanisms for dealing with stress and conflict, formation of prejudice and stereotyping, different sources of motivation, techniques for dealing with criticism, time management and personal development strategies.

**Range of relevant experience:** safe, home environment; competitive workplace; within context of continuous professional development; in a mission environment of high stress and potential danger.

**Vocational standards:****Level 1 – aware of own attitudes, emotions and behaviour**

- 1.1 Demonstrates awareness of own attitudes, opinions and assumptions
- 1.2 Displays emotions appropriately
- 1.3 Aware of own behaviour and response mechanisms to different circumstances

**Level 2 – able to manage own attitudes, emotions and behaviour as necessary**

- 2.1 able to manage own emotions and coping mechanisms in response to stress and conflict.
- 2.2 able to display non-verbal behaviour which is congruent with message being communicated verbally
- 2.3 able to control attitudes and behaviour according to circumstances

**Level 3 –able to receive criticism and take steps for self-improvement**

- 3.1 Demonstrates awareness of how own motivations, skills, attitudes and personality affect behaviour and work patterns
- 3.2 able to receive constructive criticism and to take action to change attitudes or behaviour accordingly
- 3.3 takes steps to improve knowledge and skills

**Level 4 – able to plan and organise own life to maximise personal effectiveness**

- 4.1 able to organise oneself and work effectively and efficiently to achieve objectives.
- 4.2 able to articulate a personal development plan for self-improvement and to carry it out.
- 4.3 able to budget and manage one's time effectively.

**Level 5 – able to act as mentor to help others develop their personal skills**

- 5.1 able to help others identify and build on their strengths and weaknesses.
- 5.2 able to help others draw up and implement effective personal development plans.

**Core Skills for Conflict Work: Core Skill 5: Conflict Management**

**Summary:** Conflict management skills involve the ability to defuse a tense situation, find creative solutions, to be able to intervene where appropriate as third party and help resolve enmities through reconciliation or recourse to justice. These skills apply to inter-personal conflicts which people face in their daily lives, but are also a foundation for dealing with larger scale conflicts on an industrial or political level.



**Importance:** Conflict is an everyday fact of life for most people, but being able to handle conflict appropriately is especially important in circumstances of high stress and danger where it can quickly escalate out of all proportions. As a core skill, we are not looking in depth at the more advanced conflict transformation techniques such as mediation but at very basic responses to conflicts that arise in personal relationships, on teams and in dealings with local communities or staff of other organisations.

**Background knowledge required:** Understanding of causes, dynamics and stages of conflict; models for facilitation, negotiation, mediation and reconciliation; analysing and mapping a conflict; techniques for pacifying a crowd; levels, styles and types of conflict interventions.

**Range of relevant experience:** inter-personal conflicts in the home, neighbourhood and workplace; team conflicts; street conflicts; industrial and political conflicts; violent conflicts;

**Vocational standards****Level 1 – able to identify conflict situations and possible courses of action**

- 1.1 able to identify seriousness of a conflict and options for dealing with it
- 1.2 aware of own triggers and responses to potential conflict situations

**Level 2 – able to effectively manage one's own conflicts**

- 2.1 able to manage one's own conflicts appropriately
- 2.2 able to negotiate a simple agreement

**Level 3 – able to intervene appropriately to manage inter-personal conflicts**

- 3.1 able to intervene appropriately as a third party to a conflict situation
- 3.2 able to calm a threatening situation without adverse reaction
- 3.3 able to encourage or cajole parties to the negotiating table
- 3.4 able to determine the appropriateness of mediation and be able to explain the process to the parties involved

**Level 4 – able to promote effective strategies for managing conflict**

- 4.1 able to set up a mediation process
- 4.2 able to promote reconciliation between parties
- 4.3 able to assist parties in their negotiation efforts

**Level 5 – able to design and implement effective conflict interventions**

- 5.1 able to design and implement a process of multi-track diplomacy
- 5.2 able to design and implement a reconciliation process

**Core Skills for Conflict Work: Core Skill 6: Observation Skills**

**Summary:** This involves the ability to identify and discern what is going on around you, to be able to distinguish what is normal and what is unusual, and to be able to corroborate different accounts of an event in order to determine what really happened as objectively as possible.



**Importance:** Monitoring activities are at the root of most work in this field, whether in the area of human rights, democratisation, security, rule of law, media or administration. Monitoring, in turn, rests largely on observation skills, also essential for your own safety and security. Observation is a key skill which everyone has to some extent, but whose importance few fully appreciate. However advanced one's powers of observation, few fail to benefit from developing this skill further.

**Background knowledge required:** Scientific approach to observation; intelligence gathering; interview techniques; dangers of misinformation; establishing trust and confidence with sources; forensic techniques

**Range of relevant experience:** familiar surroundings; different city; different country; different culture; conflict zone; for personal security; for forensic evidence gathering; for scientific research.

**Vocational standards:****Level 1 – aware of surroundings and what is going on in immediate environment**

1.1 is aware of surroundings and activities taking place

**Level 2 – able to identify patterns of behaviour and activity**

2.1 notices unusual activity and changes to immediate environment

2.2 is alert to the unexpected or different

2.3 is able to identify patterns of behaviour and activity

**Level 3 – able to accurately record observations**

3.1 is aware of subtle changes to normal patterns of behaviour and activity

3.2 is able to identify and observe pre-set categories of behaviour or activity

3.3 is able to accurately record observations according to a pre-set format

**Level 4 – able to check and verify observations of others**

4.1 is able to conduct and record interviews to obtain observations of others

4.2 is able to check and verify observations against those of others

**Level 5 – able to establish accurate record of events from conflicting accounts**

5.1 is able to set up and conduct an investigation into the facts of an incident

5.2 is able to compare observations and draw appropriate conclusions as to the correct interpretation of an incident

5.3 is able to write up a convincing account of what took place including plausible explanations for conflicting interpretations.

## **Core Skills for Conflict Work: Core Skill 7: Teamwork**

**Summary of skill:** Teamwork skills include the ability to share information with others, divide up tasks appropriately, plan and implement one's own work in close coordination with others and maintain good working relationships with them. It means being able to adapt one's work patterns, styles and priorities to fill gaps and meet the needs of the team as a whole.



**Why this skill is important:** Being able to work well with other team members and to contribute constructively to team efforts is essential for all team-based work. Most conflict work takes place within multi-cultural teams consisting of people from many different countries and cultures. This is an added dimension which makes effective teamwork all the more important as a core skill.

**Background knowledge required:** how culture impacts work styles, teamwork and communication; roles played by different members of a team; development stages which teams go through; strategies for more effective teams; decision-making procedures in small groups; types of meetings and reporting mechanisms; types of information and means of sharing and disseminating information (including boards, emails, reports and meetings); what information should be shared with whom and when; leadership styles and leadership in a mission environment.

**Range of relevant experience:** teams composed of different nationalities, different genders, different ages, different religions, different occupational backgrounds and motivations, different political views; teams working in difficult and stressful conditions; working in pairs, small teams and large teams; being a constructive team member or a team leader; teams working for small NGOs, large NGOs, official governmental and inter-governmental agencies and missions.

### **Vocational standards:**

#### Level 1 – able to work in a team

- 1.1 treats other members of the team with courtesy and respect
- 1.2 contributes ideas freely and openly within the team
- 1.3 honours commitments made to team members

#### Level 2 – able to play an active role in shaping team direction

- 2.1 contributes appropriately to their role in the team
- 2.2 accepts share of responsibility and supports other team members
- 2.3 shows skill in resolving conflicts and tensions

#### Level 3 – able to adapt contribution to compensate for weaknesses in a team

- 3.1 balances own agenda and needs with shared objectives and needs.
- 3.2 consults with team members about proposed activities at appropriate times and in a manner which encourages open, frank discussion
- 3.3 discusses evaluation of work and behaviour directly with team members concerned.

#### Level 4 – able to create and lead a team:

- 4.1 able to motivate team members to fulfil tasks allocated to them with commitment and enthusiasm
- 4.2 ensures team members have effective opportunities to contribute to the development of the work
- 4.3 correctly and promptly identifies problems which team members are experiencing
- 4.4 ensures that team members receive the support they need to achieve their objectives

#### Level 5 – able to develop teams to improve overall effectiveness:

- 5.1 able to identify, design and deliver training and development needs in a team
- 5.2 able to define and adapt team objectives so as to maximise learning and development while achieving team objectives.
- 5.3 able to motivate team members to improve their effectiveness and cohesion as a team.

**Core Skills for conflict Work: Core Skill 8: Cultural Sensitivity**

**Summary:** Cultural sensitivity skills include the ability to adapt one's behaviour and communication patterns to a different cultural setting, to relate appropriately to people from different cultures, to appreciate how cultural differences affect relationships and work patterns.



**Why this skill is important:** This is possibly the most important of all the core skills for conflict work. Without an appreciation and sensitivity towards other cultures and ways of doing things, it is impossible to make a positive contribution to conflict situations. Unfortunately too many people have gone into such situations without cultural sensitivity skills and ended up causing more harm than good. We therefore place a very heavy emphasis on developing culturally-appropriate responses to a range of situations you may find yourself in when living in another country.

**Knowledge required:** Understanding of different cultures; knowledge of own cultural biases and assumptions; understanding of body language and non-verbal communication; 'do no harm' approach; concept of 'culture shock'; cultural differences to time, work, leisure, decision-making, authority, law, etc.

**Range of relevant experience:** Other Western cultures; non-Western cultures; working in multi-cultural teams; relating to host communities; relating to other organisational cultures; relating to military and police cultures; different ages; different religions; different political views; different sexual orientation; different classes; the issue of racism.

**Vocational standards:***Level 1 – awareness of cultural differences*

- 1.1 Able to identify cultural differences
- 1.2 able to cope with 'culture shock' in a new place

*Level 2 – able to exercise culturally appropriate behaviour*

- 2.1 able to exercise culturally appropriate behaviour
- 2.2 able to communicate effectively across cultural barriers
- 2.3 able to use non-verbal communication appropriate to different cultures

*Level 3 – able to address culturally sensitive issues appropriately*

- 3.1 able to explain importance of culturally sensitive approach
- 3.2 able to intervene to challenge inappropriate attitudes and behaviour
- 3.3 able to respond appropriately to a range of different cultural challenges

*Level 4 – able to promote culturally sensitive approaches to one's work*

- 4.1 able to pro-actively promote cultural sensitivity among internationals
- 4.2 able to identify and implement culturally sensitive approach to work

*Level 5 – able to develop and implement cultural sensitivity programmes*

- 5.1 able to develop and implement programmes to raise cultural sensitivity of international actors and donors.
- 5.2 able to monitor and evaluate impact of interventions from a cross-cultural perspective.

**Core Skills for Conflict Work: Core Skill 9: Gender Awareness**

**Summary:** Gender awareness as a skill is about being able to relate appropriately to the opposite sex; being aware of gender difference, discrimination and inequality; being able to address gender issues appropriately and design programmes to redress inequalities and discriminatory practices.



**Importance:** It is a requirement of the EU, as well as of many other organisations employing people in this field, that you fully understand and take on board basic principles of gender equality and appropriate behaviour towards members of the opposite sex in various situations. These are not principles which people necessarily grow up with in many cultures, but behaving appropriately is a skill like any other which can be learnt and put into practice.

**Underpinning knowledge required:** Basic techniques to overcome gender-related barriers to full effectiveness; the concept of gender and gender roles as opposed to sexual differences. current trends and challenges in the field; implications of conflict for gender roles and potential risks in the light of human and civil rights protection and participation in society; potential differences in male/female gender roles in post-conflict societies, particularly potential discriminatory responses and alienation; purpose and advantages of introducing a gender dimension in conflict analysis; the adverse effects for post-conflict rehabilitation inherent in ignoring gender roles in the host society; concrete actions for the empowerment of women.

**Range of relevant experience:** Gender issues in own country; differences in other Western countries; in conflict areas; in Muslim or Arabic countries; in traditional cultures.

**Vocational standards:**Level 1 – able to relate appropriately to opposite sex

- 1.1 able to maintain appropriate professional working relationship with members of the opposite sex
- 1.2 able to relate appropriately to women in positions of authority

Level 2 – awareness of gender issues as distinct from sex difference

- 2.1 demonstrates awareness of gender issues as distinct from sex difference
- 2.2 able to identify discriminatory practices and report these to the appropriate authorities

Level 3 – able to address gender issues appropriately

- 3.1 able to articulate how gender relations affect conflict and are affected by it
- 3.2 able to address gender issues that come up appropriately
- 3.3 able to intervene appropriately to challenge unacceptable attitudes and behaviour

Level 4 – able to actively promote gender awareness and gender equality

- 4.1 able to pro-actively promote gender awareness and gender sensitivity
- 4.2 able to articulate and assert policies and principles of gender equality and the empowerment of women in post-conflict societies

Level 5 – able to develop and implement gender awareness programmes

- 5.1 able to develop and implement concrete actions for the empowerment of women in post-conflict societies