



LOFTY TELLS THIS STORY...

Lying Dead in the Snow

Several years ago a facilitator was struggling in the middle of a very difficult workshop with a small NGO of about 20 people. The organisation was at war with itself, consumed by infighting and distrust between the managers and the fieldworkers. The director had turned to him to help resolve the conflict.

He had begun the process by asking people to share their experiences and understanding of the problems. The director and managers told their side of the story and the field-staff told theirs, while the administrative staff remained silent, as usual. There was no agreement on what the problems were. They were describing what seemed like two different organisations and always it was 'the others' who were to blame. Then the facilitator asked the staff to go away in their three groups, with crayons and flipchart paper, telling each group to draw a picture of the organisation, of the crisis situation.

Forty minutes later they returned. The managers wanted to show their picture first. It was of an apple tree with healthy fruit at the top and rotting apples at the bottom. This did not help and perhaps even reinforced the divisions. The field staff's picture was more interesting. It was an aerial view of a house with no roof and several rooms, but all the doors were on the outside, with none on the inside. This led to some discussion and they agreed that there were communication problems for which they were all responsible. Then the administrative staff showed their picture. The picture was of a lovely deer, lying in snow, with barbed wire wrapped around its neck and blood gushing out. It was dead.

The facilitator says he remembers feeling a sense of shock in the room. In that moment the organisation changed forever. It was a jolt to all of them to see the truth so brutally told, and by the administrators, all women, who had been so quiet. From then on the conversations changed completely as people became more honest and open to each other, and by the end of the day a way forward was found.

The managers and field staff described what seemed like two completely different organisations.

