

An abstract graphic consisting of several overlapping circles in various shades of gray. On the left, a smaller circle contains a grid of darker, rounded rectangular shapes. A horizontal arrow points from this grid towards the right, passing through the overlapping circles.

Human Difference and Creation of Better Social Worlds: An Autoethnography

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An Autoethnography

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Abstract

As facilitators of social change, communication practitioners aim to facilitate the creation of environments in which constructive communication can occur in ways that both honor difference and build mutual respect among participants. Difference is not regarded as an obstacle, but a positive resource for creativity and change. Continuous reflection on practitioners' skills, methods and processes reveals a fresh and compelling view of the path forward. By investigating the past forty years of research and practice in two fields, communication and conflict and social construction, autoethnographic reflections provide the basis for renewed commitments on the path forward taken by communication specialists. The first of those reflections follows the focus from dispute resolution through conflict management to the new World of Difference orientation—a format for understanding human differences and wondering how interacting humans orient toward those differences. The second reflection acknowledges the significance of people designing and creating their preferred futures. This direction for the facilitation of social change introduces design thinking as a foundation for processes to create better social worlds. Implications for these two reflections suggest a liberation from the constraints of labels such as “conflict,” “problems,” and “resolution.” The resulting contribution to a communication practitioner toolkit contains the World of Difference orientation for managing human differences, and design thinking as a conceptual stance for the creation of deliberate and effective patterns of communication. Taking an autoethnographic look at the evolution of this orientation looks back at the two fields and forward at opportunities for better social worlds.

Dedication

This body of work and resulting commitments are dedicated to Stephen Littlejohn, who traveled the road with me, both personally and professionally, in pursuit of better social worlds.

Acknowledgments

Thank you to Sheila McNamee, my dinner companion in Bilbao, Spain, and brilliant dissertation advisor, who encouraged me onward in this program. Your dedication to our field and sparkling role model for women in social change has given me inspiration and enjoyment during my time in the Tilburg University PhD program of Humanities.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Note to Reader

This is a backward and forward look at communication, conflict and social construction. A reflection on the past provides implications for my future practice. I will consider four decades of research and writing contributions to two fields: 1) communication and conflict and 2) social construction. My writing charts both how ideas transition and expand into something connected as well as show how certain ideas and practices drop out of use. This manuscript is a reflection on my 40 years of communication consulting practice and attention to communication and its relationship to conflict. It is also an inquiry about my future and how the reflection on a 40-year past suggests implications for future communication consulting practice for myself and others. Reader, you will be a voyeur who travels the journey with me as I look back at that practice and wonder about “what I was creating.” I pose some questions at some of the intersections and offer insights about the new frontier I am about to embark on next. Since I began studying and consulting in the 1970s, that is the earliest period this manuscript focuses on, while acknowledging the existence of a previous rich history. Hopefully other communication practitioners (coaches, mediators, therapists, facilitators, teachers, evaluators, and other third party helpers) will benefit from this backward and forward look at communication and conflict.

Allow me to clarify what this manuscript is about, and what it is not about. I have a rich history of attention to the field of communication and conflict. This writing recaps some of my 40 years of research, writing and practice in the field as a communication consultant. Using a myriad of actual cases and examples from this work, I highlight both the era of focus and the evolution of theory. What this manuscript focuses on is a reflection on my practice and experience. Even though I have written four books on the subject, created two videos, and served three U.S. presidents, numerous industries, organizations, groups and individuals in my

consulting work, this manuscript is not an all-inclusive statement about the field of conflict management, communication and conflict, or any related theories. I reference two excellent handbooks that are more inclusive of the fields—*The Blackwell Handbook of Mediation: Bridging Theory, Research, and Practice*, by Margaret S. Herrman, 2006, and *The SAGE Handbook of Conflict Communication: Integrating Theory, Research, and Practice* by John Oetzel and Stella Ting-Toomey, 2013—but I highlight only the writing, research, and practices that have found their way into my experience. I am a working professional with a theory-based practice and a multitude of projects and experiences ripe for this compilation. Through this inquiry I hope to contribute to the academic field of communication and deepen my own understanding and commitment to my principled practice. In summary:

- This manuscript is a reflection of theories and writing pertinent to my practice. As I reflect, I entertain possibilities for forward movement.
- This manuscript is not a comprehensive overview of the evolution of research and writing on communication and conflict, or social construction. It includes only those contributions that substantially informed my practice as a communication scholar, educator, and consultant during the highlighted four decades.
- This manuscript is not an exploration of any other field than the discipline of communication. There are significant writings and research on communication and conflict from other fields, such as psychology, sociology and business. This manuscript focuses on the *communication* discipline and its contributions to conflict management.
- The skills, methods and writing offered in this manuscript are solely from my communication practice, most of which were developed in consultation with my long-time business partner Stephen Littlejohn and drawn from a wealth of other colleagues in a

variety of collaborations. Much of this manuscript contains excerpts from books I have written with Stephen.

- Reflections come from my looking back at the decades of research and writing in order to look forward at the practice of communication and possibilities for forward movement. Ongoing creations are noticed and enlarged upon.

I ask myself: How can a communication practitioner assist others in untangling their stuck spots to create thriving, happy relationships and lives?

Note to Self

There is a difference between a reflection for the sake of reflection, and a reflection with a goal toward impacting the future. I want to create a world where I live and model continuous self-reflection. This reflection empowers and equips me to be the happy and content self that can assist others in their journey toward happiness and contentment. What commitments do I hold throughout this reflection? What type of questions or insights am I aiming for as the reflection in this book concludes? In October 2012, I had the opportunity to speak with feminist activist Gloria Steinem for five minutes. At age 78, Gloria looked vital, healthy, and glowing. Her presentation that night was articulate and stimulating. Since she is the author of seven books and numerous other publications and accomplishments, I asked her for advice about my budding writing project, “How do you visualize the focus and path forward for a writing project?” Gloria simply answered, “You write what you need.”

What do I need? The answer emerges in this manuscript. I begin with these commitments.

- Communication shapes who I am and the world in which I live.
- Human beings are connected in a complex web of interactions, relationships, or patterns.

- These communication patterns create our social world. Sometimes the patterns are valuable, and sometimes they are challenging or even harmful.
- I need to create patterns of communication that are valuable and bring joy.

These commitments are mirrored in this manuscript, with pauses and reflections throughout to capture what is emerging and ponder what seems to have passed, creating valuable patterns of communication for my life and writing. I remember the advice that writer Natalie Goldberg (2005) gives her writing students: “writing is 90% listening.” So, Kathy, listen and write.

A Taste of the Journey

This manuscript may resemble a historical look at communication and conflict, and it does somewhat contain that focus. As noted in my commitments above, *the creation of social worlds through communication* is central to construction of identity and relationships. That construction profoundly affects the historical look at communication and conflict, as well as insights about the future. I enter this writing project as an “artisan.” I like to think that communicators who follow a theory-driven practice as artisans work in a slightly different manner than “artists.” Like those artists skilled in painting, music, writing, and sculpture, an artisan is creative but their work is also practical and functional. They are skilled craftspersons who use materials at hand to produce useful and needed items. They look at what is desired and required, both in the moment and in the future, and using practical theory make something that can be tested and proven through practice and use. Bricklayers, coppersmiths, masons, tanners, and weavers are considered artisans. Of course, there is a significant artistic quality to their work. Artisans know when it is appropriate to bring out their artistic talents, and when they need to work hard to produce the needed essential material using their practical skills and resources at hand.

This manuscript has resources. It offers the resources of a rich history of communication, conflict, and social construction writing, research, and practice. One more specific group of resources comes from material in conflict management, mediation, negotiation, and the management of human difference. Another group of resources comes from social construction theory and practice, with substance such as Appreciative Inquiry, dialogue, and reflective practice. Stephen Littlejohn and I borrowed the metaphor of an “artisan” from our colleague Coco Fuks, to capture those who work within the commitment to collaborative construction of social worlds (Littlejohn & Domenici 2001). Artisans create and arrange materials for a practical purpose to address a need. Artisans use a variety of media; they employ their creative *artistic* talents to develop a brick fence, a solar-powered house, a city utility system, or a pewter bowl. Where an artist can rearrange to their heart’s content, an artisan drives toward choosing a final design, process, or scheme. They have occasion to pull out their artistic side, rearranging the flowers (our attitudes, processes, and methods to manage difference) as time permits. The majority of the time they are craftspersons, and there is a pressing reason for their efforts: a family in distress, a workplace that is not functioning fully, a future that needs to be created, two countries that cannot decide on border policy, or two people who need a channel for clear communication. They use their skills, methods, and theory to craft a useful process that has the best possibility of generating positive change.

The remainder of this introduction gives a brief overview of my artisan work, as experienced and observed by me in each decade from 1970 to today. The decades serve as foci for reflection, in order to build toward the resources needed for the artisan toolkit as I move forward into 2015 and beyond. As I begin to look back and see what forms the basis for my artisan toolkit, I ask of each decade:

- 1) What was being written, taught, and practiced about communication and conflict?
- 2) What was being written, taught, and practiced about social construction?
- 3) What methods, skills, and examples represent that writing, teaching, and practice?
- 4) What questions and reflections are we invited to consider from that era?

Chapter Two provides the backbone for the decades reflection. It briefly scans the social science theory and concepts that are referred to and built upon throughout the manuscript. Chapter Three offers a more in depth exploration of the two foci: communication and conflict and social construction, along with my reflections and case studies for four decades. Each decade exploration ends with my personal reflection of that decade, some examples of work, and questions that arose. The 1970s have limited personal reflections, as I was just finishing my undergraduate studies and barely had entertained the notion of consulting in the communication field. The 1980s are also somewhat limited, as those were my childrearing years. The 1990s and the 2000s were chock full of movement, invigorating practice, and writing. Those sections of Chapter Three are much more lengthy and illustrative. Chapter Four develops my reflections more fully and sets the stage for updating my artisan toolkit. Those reflections are the underpinning for Chapter Five, where I test this new artisan toolkit on actual projects. The final set of reflections and commitments complete the circle of artisan efforts over the 40-year journey.

This manuscript is narrated using variety of "voices." The first portion of the manuscript is a brief overview of 40-years of theory and practice in communication and conflict and social construction explained mostly in the third person voice. For the last 15 years I had a business partnership with Dr. Stephen Littlejohn. We practiced as communication consultants together

for over a decade, developed communication and conflict theory, wrote about it in four books, and presented it in two videos, multiple trainings and university courses. For the last portion of the 40-year overview, I often switch voices to the first person. When I speak of “we” or “us,” I am referring to my work with Stephen. It was a privilege to co-create with him, and I honor that privilege in this way. Much of this manuscript comes from our publications.

Table 1 was originally sketched on a napkin and shared over breakfast with Sheila McNamee (Taos Institute) and John Rijsman (Tilburg University) as a conversation starter. Their interest and encouragement was the impetus for my entry into the PhD program.

Table 1: Evolution of communication and conflict and social construction: inviting reflection

Decade	Communication and Conflict	Social Construction	Skills, Methods, Cases	Reflection
1970s	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transmission model • Persuasion • Privilege Speaking • Conflict Modes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Social Construction of Reality (Berger & Luckmann) *Presentation of Self (Goffman) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Position-based negotiation • Compliance gaining 	What is the role of conflict prevention? Avoidance?
1980s	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interests vs. Positions • Mediation Process • CMM • Milan Systemic Model 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Foucault (narrative turn) *Toward Transformation in Social Knowledge (Gergen) *80's: Appreciative Inquiry *Pearce & Cronen (Communication, Action, and Meaning) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BATNA • Kaleidoscope • Appreciative Inquiry • Circular Questions 	Can we approach conflict as an opportunity for growth and positive change?
1990s	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Empowerment • Moral Conflict • Systemic practice • Transcending conflict • (PDC, Taos Institute, PCP) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Saturated Self (Gergen) *Relational Responsibility (Gergen, McNamee) *Generative Theory (“Refiguring” Gergen) *Moral Conflict (Pearce, Littlejohn) *Invitation to SC (Gergen) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Featured Listeners • Reflecting Teams • Mediation • Prosperity Games (multilogue) • Public Dialogue • Micro- & Macro-focus 	How can a “systemic” focus help construct more satisfactory outcomes?
2000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Privilege stories • Empowerment & Recognition (transformation) • Management of 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> *Social Construction of What? (Hacking) *Inviting Transformation (Foss, Foss) *Appreciative Organization (Anderson, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage/challenge/create • Curious questions • Reframe mediation (to planning?) 	How can we hold our own ground and be profoundly open to the other? Transform conflict?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Difference Facework Conflict and Culture 	Cooperrider, Gergen) *Appreciative Inquiry (Cooperrider, Whitney) *Socially Constructing Communication (Galanes, Leeds-Hurwitz)	coaching? Transformation?) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> LARC Facework at the Center CVA 2006 NCA Conference 	What term should we use for “social construction”?
2010	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Moral Imagination (CMM Institute) Integral Coaching 	*Relational Being (Gergen) *Research & Social Change(McNamee, Hosking) *Gender Stories (Foss, Domenico, Foss)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Relational Constructionist Research Moral Imagination “Radically Relational Orientation” 	What is the role of questions without answers? Technology? How do we create sacred space? How do we create well-being?

My Personal Evolution by Decade

In the 1970s, I studied Communication at the University of Minnesota in Duluth, the Land of 10,000 Lakes. In the crisp, often chilly air, my colleagues and I learned about the hypodermic needle model of communication. The needle is filled with something (your intended communication message) and “shot” into another person. If the person did not get the intended message, the search for interference ensues. Was there a problem in the wording of the message itself? Was there something in the environment that messed up the transmission? Was the receiver not ready for the message or not listening well? The assumption is that the needle shoots out the message. It is powerful and direct, and if a problem (conflict) occurs in the transmission, the communication is faulty. As we “shoot” our messages into our receivers (receptacles), it is clear what is privileged in communication. The speaker’s communication is the focus, and the trouble begins when the intended message somehow is not accepted and grasped. Hence, this era of communication study and practice showcased one-way communication. Courses in Public Speaking, Debate, Argumentation, and Persuasion taught us

about compliance gaining, social influence, and communication competence. *Conflict was seen as the case of an intended message inadequately received.*

In the 1980s, I was busy having children and using my communication consulting to assist mothers, families, parenting groups, and women such as myself struggling to be genuine and vital. One of the contributions I offered during these years was to teach a course called, “How to talk so kids will listen, and listen so kids will talk.” The focus was still somewhat the hypodermic needle model, but I was beginning to discover a new purpose for communication. I could affect change by my communication. My speech was more than a vessel to deliver my message, but I could intentionally adjust my world. As the 1980s neared an end, and my children were teenagers, I could use them as a fertile ground for this investigation into creating social worlds through communication.

In the early 1990s, I began graduate school at the University of New Mexico. Studying interpersonal communication and conflict, I was formally introduced to social construction. Now I heard about a concept that named what I had suspected for years: I *can* significantly impact my social world through my communication. Family meetings now became environments where we all addressed topics such as: *How do we organize parking spots in our driveway so no one gets blocked in?* This topic could have emerged as: *I want to park so I can get out first in the morning.* But, choosing intentional communication, we talked about family parking in a new way where everyone contributed and collaborated on the plan. These explorations encouraged me to write my first book, a textbook for mediation called *Mediation: Empowerment in Conflict Management* (Domenici & Littlejohn 2001).

As year 2000 rolled around, I was a full-fledged communication consultant. People paid me to assist them in creating their own social worlds through their communication choices. I

facilitated conflict management, strategic planning, group decision-making, and mediations. I taught university courses and offered workshops and seminars. I co-authored three books, each one moving further away from directive communication and more toward the management of human difference.

In the current decade, I have seen my share of personal and societal conflict. My practice has matured, and I continue delving into a reflection of the past four decades in order to produce some insight for the next 10 years. What works? What has made a difference in the management of human difference and social construction of our realities?

Autoethnography

In this manuscript I tell a story of my own experiences and theorize from those experiences to construct a path forward. After many years of communication analysis of other groups, individuals, cultures, and institutions, it is a pleasure to look at my own stories lived and told in order to view the self (in this case, “my” self) as the focus for creating the future. The *Encyclopedia of Communication Theory* (Warren 2009) defines this work as “Autoethnography.” The goal of this work is not to produce some type of accurate facts, whether about managing conflict or socially constructing our world, but rather

to expose one’s experiences in order to investigate how they are produced by (while producing) culture. In this way, the goal of truth as an outcome of research is secondary to tracing, in a reflexive manner, one’s cultural experiences in order to understand how they illuminate communication working in a particular setting (p. 68).

This method of writing combines components of autobiography and ethnography. While an autobiographer writes about past experiences, singling out significant moments for contemplation, an ethnographer studies cultural practices, beliefs, values, and experiences in

order to help better understand traditions and way of living. My autoethnography tells about my experiences and, for the social science publishing conventions, analyzes those experiences to reveal “epiphanies” or remembered moments perceived to have significantly impacted the trajectory of my life (Ellis, 2010).

Carolyn Ellis is an autoethnographer who focuses on writing and revisioning autoethnographic stories as a way to understand and interpret culture and live a meaningful life (Ellis, 2004). She offers thoughts for those tasked with evaluating an autoethnography. Assuming the readers of this manuscript seek such criteria, I offer the following, as suggested by Ellis, based on Laurel Richardson’s article (2000).

- (a) Substantive contribution. Does the piece contribute to our understanding of social life?
- (b) Aesthetic merit. Does this piece succeed aesthetically? Is the text artistically shaped, satisfyingly complex, and not boring?
- (c) Reflexivity. How did the author come to write this text? How has the author’s subjectivity been both a producer and a product of this text?
- (d) Impactfulness. Does this affect me emotionally and/or intellectually? Does it generate new questions or move me to action?
- (e) Expresses a reality. Does this text embody a fleshed out sense of lived experience?

Substantive contribution. As I compare my experience writing and researching in communication and conflict with the evolution of the social construction field, I illuminate examples of how I “made meaning” throughout the decades. The creation of social worlds through my consulting practice had *aha* moments and epiphanies that I record as a contribution to the overlapping fields of communication, conflict management, and social construction.

Aesthetic merit. If we view this manuscript through a smorgasbord metaphor, the dishes that are tasted and explored are tasty and inviting. Some dishes are not tasted, and some are devoured. My conclusions highlight the dishes that were most enjoyed by myself and others, as well as the dishes I did not sample. Recommendations for the next smorgasbord table are the culmination of my reflections about the culinary journey. The chosen dishes to taste are colorful, inviting, and satisfying.

Reflexivity. The autoethnography may be seen as an alternate form of writing, but it really is an inquiry into my own stories. Since my consulting practice has been committed to layered examinations of my work and its outcomes (social creations), I see this work as a social constructionist project. My continuous commitment to reflection has resulted in the creation of new theories, concepts, and practices.

Impactfulness. From the very first consideration of this writing project, I have been excited and motivated by the impact it will have on my life and practice. The autoethnography is a form of postmodernist writing, the freedom of which is invigorating and challenging. Gazing at all the dishes on the smorgasbord table is somewhat overwhelming, but I do know my stories are rich enough to create a quality impact on the reader and the sampler of this sensory experience.

Expresses a reality. For four decades I have held a space that privileges communication, both as a focus and as a channel, as a certainty for the creation of preferred social worlds. After having developed and tested multiple theories, skills, and methods, I plan to offer an authentic recounting of my experience and its reflexive journey.

As I begin to arrange and rearrange my observations and perceptions of these four decades, I feel “shaken by the winds of modernism,” as Isabel Allende said as she described her characters in *The House of Spirits* (1985). On napkins and scraps of papers, all thrown into a bin in my

workspace, I have poems, quotes, thoughts, photos, and other ways of recapping my journey as a communication consultant through the decades. This moment I am beginning writing feels similar to the one Allende described.

Carried away by vocational zeal, the priest had all he could do to avoid openly disobeying the instructions of his ecclesiastical superiors, who, shaken by the winds of modernism, were opposed to hair shirts and flagellation (p. 2).

Chapter 2: Backbone

Often people ask me to explain my career to understand the “job” of a communication consultant. When they ask, “what do you do?” I many times answer, “Watch me work.” My answer indicates that I privilege the experience, the action, rather than the principles or the definition. So, to produce a dissertation that connects the thinking and the doing, it is necessary to lay the foundation for this focus. This chapter presents a backbone for the theory and thinking that are the subject of this dissertation. Using the metaphor of a body, we know the backbone serves as the basis for bodily coherence and strength. The backbone structure within which this manuscript is produced originates from a movement, or philosophical tradition, and is a place to start to convey other traditions that emanate from it as well as the work that is produced within this tradition. The backbone for this writing is American Pragmatism. The “ribs” are the major traditions that are strengthened and developed from the backbone. Those major traditions can hardly be separated, as they are so tightly connected to the backbone and to the body itself (social life). The major traditions illuminated in this chapter are social construction, Coordinated Management of Meaning (CMM), systems theory, Appreciative Inquiry (AI), moral conflict and dialogic communication. They exist together in this manuscript, as in my communication practice. The skin over the body is the communication perspective

The movement from a philosophy to its work in the world is evident throughout this dissertation. As invited by one of the masters of American pragmatism, William James (1975), my writing focuses on the “fruits, not roots.” The roots of social life and human interaction are explored in this chapter, with the fruits, or practical results, of those roots explored throughout the rest of the manuscript. William James was a physician who died in 1910 but is more widely known as a philosopher and psychologist. One of the leading American thinkers from the late

19th century, James has often been called “the father of American psychology.” If he fathered American psychology, then he is also known for another one of his children: pragmatism. Along with Charles Pierce and John Dewey, James directed us to look at the practical impact of our thinking, and to ask the question that is the mantra of many social construction practitioners today, “What is getting made in our social interactions?” In contrast to the tradition of idealism, where we are directed to think in order to represent or mirror reality, pragmatism invites us to think in order to accomplish something.

In his presentation at the University of California Berkeley in 1898, James first labels himself a pragmatist and uses the metaphor of travel along a trail (James 1898). If this trail is the path to truth and we are concerned with staying on that path, the work of Charles S. Pierce is heralded by James as the key to finding the path.

He is one of the most original of contemporary thinkers; and the principle of practicalism—or pragmatism, as he called it, when I first heard him enunciate it at Cambridge in the early '70's—is the clue or compass by following which I find myself more and more confirmed in believing we may keep our feet upon the proper trail (Burkhardt, Bowers & Skrupskelis 1975).

James further expresses thoughts about that trail, acknowledging that we can test it by looking at the conduct or action it dictates or inspires.

Robert Richardson details James and the pragmatic tradition in his book *The Heart of William James* (2010). Describing the philosophy of action that is inherent in pragmatism, Richardson invites us to acknowledge that as pragmatists we can evaluate actions better by their results than by their initial intentions or origins. The American pragmatism movement serves as the backbone to the ribs, the major traditions of social construction, Coordinated Management of

Meaning (CMM), systemic theory, Appreciative Inquiry (AI), moral conflict and dialogic communication. Each will be explored briefly, and expanded on later in subsequent chapters.

Rib #1: Social Construction

In the early 20th century, George Herbert Mead¹ moved pragmatism into social psychology through developing *symbolic interactionism*. Reality is social, and people respond to their social understandings of reality. Mead and his student Blumer (1969) set out three basic perspectives of symbolic interactionism:

- Humans act toward things on the basis of the meanings they ascribe to those things.
- The meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with others and the society.
- These meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the things he/she encounters.

The first rib from the pragmatism backbone is thus born. Social construction theory agrees that humans assign meanings to social life out of their interactions with others. Within this tradition, we look for ways that social worlds are built using communication, rather than using communication as one aspect of the search for truth in social worlds. Social reality is not something that existed before we began looking for it. We create our worlds through our language and other symbols. Berger and Luckmann (1967) saw that the *social construction of reality* posits our knowing as social and gives us a way to understand human communication. The social world is a continuing creation and “when we communicate, we are not just talking *about* the world; we are literally participating in the creation of the social universe (Pearce, 1994, p. 75).

¹ For more about Mead’s primary work in symbolic interactionism, see *Mind, Self, and Society* (Morris, 1934). For ongoing information about the field, see the journal *Symbolic Interaction* (Wiley) or the *Studies in Symbolic Interaction* (Emerald).

To investigate the “roots” (which James contrasts to “fruits”) of social construction is to look at how human knowledge is constructed through social interaction. An object is defined and understood by how we talk about that object, the words we use to capture our meanings, and the way that other social groups respond and experience it (Littlejohn & Foss, 2009). In Chapter Three of this manuscript, social construction is highlighted and explored as a significant part of this backbone.

Rib #2: Coordinated Management of Meaning

Strengthened by the backbone of pragmatism, Pearce, Cronen, and their colleagues saw that meaning and action are linked, which drives action and logic. Communicators can coordinate their actions without understanding one another, resulting in a satisfactory relationship. This exploration resulted in the Coordinated Management of Meaning (CMM) (Pearce & Cronen, 1980). American pragmatism gave form to theory and practice much more clearly as CMM was introduced (Cronen, 1994; Pearce, 1989; Pearce & Cronen, 1980).² CMM gave us a way to develop identity and selfhood without privileging individuality. Some terms to be explored within CMM came from Dewey (1925, 1958), such as *forming coordination*, and *habit: creating coherent connections in action*. We form coordinations with others by integrating our interactional habits. Those habits are not set in stone but can evolve and change as life evolves and changes. Wittgenstein’s *rules* (1953) are like habits in that they are the norm for the moment, but are unfinished and emergent in communication. A practitioner can enter into a human interaction and rather than focus on the “diagnosis” (mentally ill, angry, depressed, self-

² For CMM primary sources, see W. Barnett Pearce and Vernon Cronen, *Communication, Action, and Meaning* (New York: Praeger, 1980); W. Barnett Pearce and Kimberly Pearce, “Extending the Theory of the Coordinated Management of Meaning (CMM) Through a Community Dialogue Process,” *Communication Theory* 10 (2000): pp. 405-423; Vernon Cronen, Victoria Chen, and W. Barnett Pearce, “Coordinated Management of Meaning: A Critical Theory,” in *Theories in Intercultural Communication*, ed. Young Yun Kim and William B. Gudykunst (Newbury Park CA: Sage 1988), pp. 66-98; Vernon Cronen, W. Barnett Pearce, and Linda Harris, “The Coordinated Management of Meaning,” in *Comparative Human Communication Theory*, ed. F.E.X. Dance (New York: Harper & Row, 1982).

centered, or domineering), the task is to enter into the habit of communication, or the pattern that has developed, and discover a new way of living. By constructing patterns that better coordinate with the lives and patterns of those in relational interactions, people can coordinate their actions and develop better interactive abilities (Cronen & Chetro-Szivos, 2001). In Chapter Three, as I explore the 1980s, CMM and its significant contributions to communication and social construction are further illuminated.

Rib #3: Systems Theory

Cybernetic thinking is a tradition that offers perspectives on complex systems and how all parts of the system impact each other. Especially useful when looking at families, cybernetics asks us to look at how family members communicate with each other, how they interact and influence each other and what dynamics occur within what interactions. Communication is a cybernetic system that has multiple parts impacting each other. Systems theory looks at sets of interacting parts and asks how and why the influences are occurring and if there is a way to sustain or control the system over time. System theorists also look at how adaptable a system is, and how inputs and outputs change the system. Looking at systems in action helps us understand relationships among connected parts. Some see cybernetics as a branch of systems theory³, but either way, this tradition frees us from the idea that one thing causes another. Most important for the backbone of this dissertation is the connection of systems theory to social construction. Barge (2009) sees that there is a “particular exemplar of social construction that variously has been called a systemic or a systemic constructionist approach” (p. 264). This approach is traced back to Italian therapists known as the Milan Group who used a systemic framework in working

³ To get a full picture of the interplay between cybernetics and system theory, see both Norbert Weiner, *The Use of Human Beings: Cybernetics and Society*. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin 1954), pp 49-50 and S.D. Hall and R.E. Fagen, “Definition of a System,” in *Modern Systems Research for the Behavioral Scientist*, Ed. W. Buckley (Chicago: Aldine, 1968), pp. 81-92.

with family therapy in the 1970s. In systemic thinking, practitioners and theorists are concerned with patterns of communication and impact on human systems (Bateson, 1972). Rather than follow the causality stemming from personality, beliefs and opinions, or motives that predict behavior, systemic approaches ask that we pay attention to reciprocal or mutual causality. Over time, these patterns begin to be guided by relational rules which develop from within the interaction (Bateson, 1972; Bateson, Jackson, Haley & Weakland, 1956). Insights that focus on these patterns of connection among parts of the system instead of the individual elements, can discuss human interactions and resulting meaning as “made” rather than “found” (Pearce, Villar, & McAdam, 1992).

Rib #4: Appreciative Inquiry

A set of concepts hit the social change world in the 1980s, where Srivastva and Cooperrider pioneered the idea of Appreciative Inquiry as a means to mine collective assets toward the creation of a constructive future. It has become a worldwide process for facilitating social change using the simple idea that every system has something that is working *right*—things that give the system life. Seeing appreciation as much an attitude as a set of skills, they asked members of an organization or group to see their differences as a valuable resource and “make the appreciative turn” by addressing questions such as (Srivastva & Cooperrider, 1990):

- Ask them to tell about a time in which things worked well for them and what made it work well.
- Ask them about their vision for the future.
- Ask them what would be different if their concerns were eliminated.
- Acknowledge and restate positive things they say about one another and about the situation.

- Ask about the resources and assets they have available to address the issue at hand.

As a model of change management, appreciative inquiry is seen as a revolution that begins when organizations are not seen as a gathering of problems to be solved, but as a set of assets to be collected and utilized. As drivers of this revolution, Cooperrider and Whitney (2005) say that the collective strengths do more than perform, they transform. Their work is mirrored throughout this manuscript and crystallized in the concept supported in my conclusions: The era of illuminating “problem-solving” is nearing an end. We can begin our movement toward value-laden social change “with the positive presumption that organizations, as centers of human relatedness, are alive with infinite constructive capacity” (p. 3). The movement from a negative and problem focus toward life-giving and appreciative inquiry invites the “appreciative turn” (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987) and is the basis for the organization of much of this manuscript and autoethnography. Near the end of Chapter Three, I begin to offer Appreciative Inquiry as the shift that empowered my professional commitment to the social construction of preferred futures and designing better worlds. What I like to call “possibilities thinking,” appreciative inquiry turns traditional problem-solving habits into a search for energizing and capacity-building thoughts and actions that begin with appreciative questions.

Rib #5: Moral Conflict and Transcendent Discourse

Moral conflict is a clash based on deep philosophical differences. Although it surfaces in disputes about what the parties say they want and need, the division lies at a much deeper level involving assumptions about what is real, what is right, and how we can know what is real and right. The problem with those experiencing moral conflict is that normal discourses of persuasion and hegemony cannot resolve it, as the parties disagree fundamentally not only on how to measure truth, but what constitutes the normal order of things. Barnett Pearce and

Stephen Littlejohn (1997) gave us the basis for moral conflict in their important book, *Moral Conflict: When Social Worlds Collide*. The structure of moral conflict arises from moral differences. These differences stem from incommensurate moral worldviews or differing social realities.

The abortion conflict is a perfect example. Pro-life advocates believe fundamentally that only God can give and take life, that life begins at conception, and that every fetus has a right to live. Pro-choice advocates believe that the quality of life is all-important, that individuals have rights to control and make decisions about their bodies, and that life begins not at conception but at birth. Notice that this is not an interest-based conflict. It is certainly a conflict about the political issue of abortion, but the difference lies at a very deep level about what it means to be a person, what establishes truth, and how human beings should live their lives. This is why the conflict just will not go away.

Characterized by differences of worldview or ideology⁴, such conflict involves deep philosophical differences in which the parties' forms of thinking and their understandings of reality do not fit together. Such conflicts involve differences that lie much deeper than disagreement on issues and beyond differing interests. Value differences are often only part of such conflicts. Moral conflicts tend to be persistent and difficult to manage. They emerge out of the unwritten social conventions that serve to maintain social order (McNamee, 2008). Even if we define moral conflicts as deep and ideological, there is hope to address and even transform

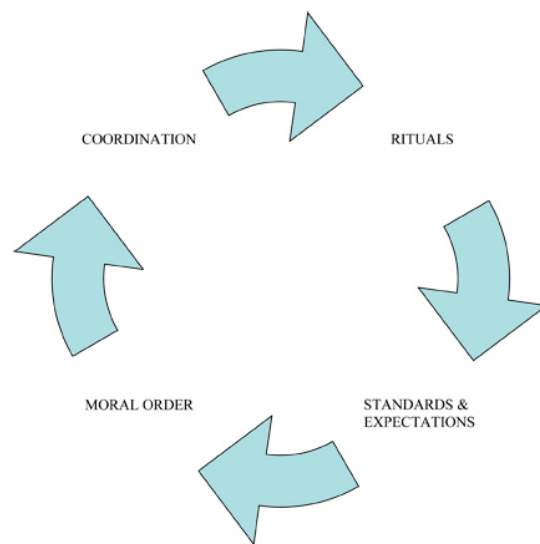
⁴ To read more about characterizing these deeper ideological differences: ⁴ Oscar Nudler, "In Replace of a Theory for Conflict Resolution: Taking a New Look at World Views Analysis," *Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution Newsletter* (summer), 1 (1993): 4-5; Jayne Seminare Docherty, *Learning Lessons from Waco: When the Parties Bring their Gods to the Negotiation Table* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2001). Daniel Druckman and Kathleen Zechmeister, "Conflict of Interest and Value Disensus: Propositions in the Sociology of Conflict," *Human Relations*, 26 (1973): 449-466.

them into a workable place where human differences can be managed and possibly transcended.

Sheila McNamee (2008) illustrates that hope as she invites us to consider,

We operate within moral orders any time we utter to ourselves the “oughtness” or “shouldness” of a given action or set of actions. To that end, we need not leave the issue of morality in the hands of ethicists and philosophers. Rather, the exploration of diverse moralities should be a common focus for us all since every morality is constructed in our day-to-day interactions with one another (p. 3).

We craft our world by our coordination and interaction with others, as illustrated in this depiction of our communication coordination.



If moral orders are *made* not *found*, we can bridge those moralities with new social, relational aspects of our communication and coordination. McNamee offers that dialogue is a way to do more than move beyond a moral order and its implications for our relationships. In dialogue we have the possibility to make a space for multiple moral orders to co-exist, where creating a space together for a new kind of communication, and transcendent place, can exist. Dialogue, or dialogic communication, is both a transcendence tool and a way of being that has the following

characteristics, as offered by the Public Dialogue Consortium (<http://publicdialogue.org/>):

Dialogic communication is *remaining in the tension between holding your ground and being profoundly open to the other*. How is this manifested in our communication? “Holding your ground” means that you can think and feel passionately about ideas, values, beliefs and decisions.

- *I would like to share with you my strongly held beliefs, but I recognize that this is only my perspective and it is one of many.*
- *Today it will be interesting to begin to understand the good reasons we all have for the perspectives we hold.*
- *Could I take a moment to tell you a couple examples from my life that have led me to hold this perspective?*

“Being profoundly open to the other” shows that you are ready to listen to and accept the good reasons that all participants in the conversation have for holding their own position.

- *What is it about that issue that makes you believe it so strongly?*
- *What are some examples from your life that allowed you to form that perspective?*
- *What is at the heart of the perspective you hold? What do you believe most strongly?*
- *Let me make sure I am hearing you correctly. I understand that you believe this (perspective), and want to make sure that (outcome) happens. Do I have that right?*

Table 2 depicts some considerations (Littlejohn & Domenici, 2007) for beginning dialogue and creating a space for the transcendent communication.

Table 2: Guidelines for Dialogue

Goals	Guidelines
<i>Create the right conditions.</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Don't wait until conflict breaks out. Engage stakeholders in conversations early on.2. If open conflict has already happened, look for the right moment, often when participants are tired of fighting or become desperate for new

	<p>solutions.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Work initially in small, private groups. 4. Be careful about the role of “leaders” and other powerful persons. Allow all of the voices to be heard from the start. 5. Build on prior success. Avoid single-shot interventions, and use a grow-as-it-goes process. 6. Be creative about process. Think about what will work best now under the conditions currently experienced.
<i>Manage safety.</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Think consciously about time and place. 2. Provide appropriate structure. 3. Solicit agreements on process. 4. Promote good facework. 5. Respond to willingness and felt need. 6. Find a shared level of comfort. 7. Leave an out. 8. Use an impartial facilitator.
<i>Provide a process that encourages constructive conversation.</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Take sufficient time to explore. 2. Encourage listening, and build listening into the process. 3. Help participants to listen beyond mere content. Listen deeply to lived experience, stories told, values, shared concerns and differences. 4. Ask good questions designed to open the conversation, not close it down. 5. Frame issues carefully to capture a context that will create a joining place. 6. Be appreciative. Look for positive resources, and look for the vision behind negative comments. 7. When speaking, aim to be understood rather than to prevail in a contest. 8. Base positions in personal experience, and help others to understand your life’s experiences. 9. Maintain a multi-valued, rather than bi-polar, purview. Listen for all the voices.
<i>Maintain ends-in-view and think about possibilities for outcomes of the conversation.</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Discover the heart of the matter, or learn what is most important to all participants. 2. Build respect by looking for the ways in which others are experienced, complex, concerned, intelligent, healthy, and rational. 3. Learn about complexity and developing a healthy suspicion of a two-valued framing of any issue.

Addressed in Chapter Three during the decade exploration of the 1990s, the concept of moral conflict and its invitation for transcendence is diffused throughout my reflections and final commitments from this dissertation.

Chapter Three: Evolution by Decade

In the manuscript introduction, an explanation of autoethnography described the purpose of autoethnographic writing as not to uncover accurate facts, but to look at one's own stories (lived and told) to better construct a path forward. This chapter provides the backdrop to those stories. Each decade section begins with an overview of world events and significant cultural issues in play for that decade, followed by a limited recap of the writings, research, and practice from communication and conflict and social construction, and ending with author reflections. These reflections are the first stories that make up the autoethnography. In response to the question of what was created in each decade, the manuscript notices ongoing creations, enlarges upon them, and looks forward to continued communication possibilities.

1970s: The “Me” Decade

From the hippie subculture of the 1960s, which focused primarily on the values of peace and love and often associated with non-violent anti-governmental groups, the 1970s became a generation of self-absorption. Tom Wolfe (1976) coined the 1970s as the “Me” decade” in a 1976 *New York* magazine article. During the “Me” decade it became popular to hire a personal analyst, guru, therapist, priest or adviser. Tom Wolfe thought that this preoccupation with self-awareness was a retreat from community. The culture moved from singing folk songs and appreciating communes to self-help and inward focuses.

World events that rocked this self-absorption include (Tompkins, 2013):

- Energy: The 1973 Oil Crisis, where OPEC announced they would no longer ship petroleum to nations that had supported Israel. The United States had sufficient oil reserves at that time, and the biggest impact was on Europe.

- War: After 10 years of war in Viet Nam, the United States pulled out all armed forces. The Cold War continued between the East and West arms race.
- Politics: President Nixon was forced to resign as president of the United States due to the Watergate scandal.
- Technology: The use of home computers was introduced, with Intel creating the first cheap microprocessor. Early use of online bulletin boards developed a new way to create community. Experiments in video games on computers began. Technology in the kitchen became more common, as microwaves and other home technologies were used.

Although many saw the 1970s as a time of self-focus and personal journeys, writing and research in the communication discipline was making some ambitious turns. Since the underpinnings of social construction was introduced in the late 1950s (Goffman, 1959) and the mid-1960s (Berger & Luckmann, 1967), the 1970s was a time for social construction to gain a foothold. Kenneth Gergen pioneered the relational view of self and the new possibilities coming from generative theory (see Chapter 2) (Gergen, 1978).

The work in communication and conflict was still in very early stages; in fact, conflict was rarely mentioned in the same context with communication theory. The research and writing in communication theory stayed a bit more stable, with holdover texts and concepts from the 1960s staying strong. These texts continued to privilege the speaker and hung on to the transmission model of communication. Later in the decade, you could take a “style inventory” to determine your most common mode of conflict management, and then adjust it so the communication transmission could be more effective. This section looks at the 1970s, exploring communication and conflict writing and research as well as social construction contributions. Some methods and skills used in communication consulting practice by the author are offered, along with basic

reflections on the social creation of that era for practitioners of communication and social construction.

Communication and conflict. The 1970s made use of a variety of texts and research from communication scholars from the 1950s and 1960s. Basic communication, public speaking, and persuasion textbooks were the mainstays of the discipline. No texts on communication and conflict existed, and rarely was the subject addressed in the popular texts of the time. One of the earliest and widely used texts was first published in 1949 called *The Mathematical Theory of Communication* (Shannon & Weaver, 1949). Claude Shannon and Warren Weaver were not social scientists but worked with telephone cables and radio waves for Bell Telephone Labs. What began as work in reducing the redundancy in language and avoiding miscommunication became one mainstay of communication study. They wondered how to better assure that a speaker's intended message effectively reached receivers. Their *transmission model of communication* had six elements:

1. *source* (where the message is produced);
2. *transmitter* (where the message is encoded into signals);
3. *channel* (where messages are transmitted);
4. *receiver* (where the message is reconstructed);
5. *destination* (where the message finally arrives); and
6. *noise* (interference with the message along the channel).

This simple and quantifiable model was attractive to other disciplines besides communication. Even in the phone industry, the metaphor worked well. The transmitter and receiver are the phone handsets, the channel is the wire, the signal is the electric current, and noise includes the crackling on the wire. The speaker is the source. In regular conversation, a

person's mouth is the transmitter, the signal is the sound waves, the other person's ear is the receiver, and noise is the myriad of environmental distractions that might hinder the message. Many use the hypodermic needle as a metaphor, expelling the message through the syringe.

When taking a closer look at the accuracy of message transmission, the receiver plays a passive role. In this linear model, which has no role for feedback, the receiver really is in a secondary role. It is the speaker's responsibility to ensure that the intended message is sent correctly, along the proper channel, with little noise. Participants in the transmission model are treated as isolated individuals. Little attention is given to context or relationships. In this model conflict is not mentioned, but can only be seen as an error in transmission or channel or the abundance of noise to distort the intended message.

As the 1950s began, the move toward using communication for persuasion became an exciting focus. Psychologist Carl Hovland recorded his thinking about attitude change. He noted that the way in which people belong to a group influences how they can resist that group's persuasion. He teamed up with colleagues Irving Janis (later famous for theory of groupthink) and Harold Kelley to write about communication and persuasion (Hovland, Kelley & Janis, 1953). Still centering on the responsibility of a speaker to corral communication competence to persuade, the transmission model began to be updated. Hovland, Kelley, and Janis still contended the centrality of the speaker by reporting that believability was strongly related to the source (speaker) as well as the source's trustworthiness. Prestigious speakers were more trustworthy in the short term, but that effect wore off over time. Source credibility had a strong social influence on acceptance of messages. During World War II, Yale Professor Hovland took a three-year leave of absence to work in the War Department. As a training expert, he experimented on the effectiveness of the motivational programs in the armed forces. He and six

graduate students looked at opinion change, testing the effects of a one-sided versus a two-sided presentation on a controversial issue. Popular opinion stated that presenting a one-sided argument had more ability to persuade. Hovland found that presenting two-sides of an argument would generally be more successful in influencing human motivation. These wartime studies were useful in the communication discipline for many years, influencing the development of debate and argumentation. The implications for conflict management are still being explored today. The field of mediation arose from an exploration and commitment to involving those affected by their conflict in the resolution of the conflict (in contrast to third parties who resolve it for them, such as judges, juries, directive managers, etc.)

David Berlo (1967) further expanded on the transmission model of communication. Still using the linear model of communication, which today is exemplified by one-way communication (email, lecture, monologue), Berlo formalized the concept into the *Sender-Message-Channel-Receiver (SMCR) Model of Communication*. Berlo was a communication theorist (rather than an engineer, such as Shannon or Weaver) and looked much more carefully at the multiple factors at play in a communication breakdown. For example, Berlo offered that the *attitude* of both the sender and receiver are crucial in understanding the success or breakdown of communication messages. Although still an individualized focus, he saw that personal habits of communication contribute to miscommunication as well as quality of assurance that the intended message was received. When a message is sent, there are three different issues occurring: 1) content (what the source wants to say); 2) code (the cues the source uses to convey it; and 3) treatment (the order and emphasis the source uses when saying it). All three issues privilege the centrality of the source and solidified the individualistic focus of the transmission model. Berlo did offer some contributions to the prevention of misunderstanding (a precursor to conflict

management), when he observed how attention to “channel” strength is important. A channel that transmits a message could be physical (the wire that takes voices from speaker to receiver), visual (a poster or television message), or aural (the air waves that carry voice or loudspeaker announcements). The significance of using more than one channel, since two-channels are better than one, is that the receiver could hopefully see *and* hear the message. Hence, emphasizing messages in a variety of ways assisted in clarifying intended messages.

Though the works explored thus far are still earlier than the 1970s, they represent the majority of communication theory offerings still available and prominent during that decade. Another large contribution, still significant today, is education, theory, and practice in public speaking. *Public Speaking as a Liberal Art* was published in 1968 (Wilson & Arnold, 1968) and used as an academic textbook as well for professional orators and politicians. Whether focusing on gestures, inflection, vocabulary, fear appeals, emotional appeals, humor, or organization, this text and its corresponding courses helped speakers transmit information and possibly motivate others to act. John Wilson and Carroll Arnold promoted the Liberal Arts tradition originating from ancient Greece, where public deliberation was celebrated in the culture.

The move from Liberal Arts public speaking textbooks to wider (less “transmission model-like”) views of communication began in the 1970s. Two books were offered in 1974 that began to change the landscape of communication and conflict and perhaps develop a new focus for the communication discipline. Miller and Steinberg (1974) gave the field an interpersonal communication textbook that still explored message sending and message receiving but now widened human communication to the whole world of relationships between and among people, contexts and situations that affect all aspects of communication, and new understandings about how and why people behave the way they do in their interactions with each other. Miller and

Steinberg made a new statement about focusing on interpersonal communication and relational development, which provided an invigorating diversion from the hypodermic needle model and one-way communication.

Also in 1974, a more deliberate focus on conflict hit the stage with the introduction of the widely used *Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument* (Thomas & Kilmann, 1974). There may have been conflict style inventories in the 1960s, but they existed for managerial dilemmas, typing employees for certain purposes. The Thomas-Kilmann inventory exists along two axes, labeled "assertiveness" and "cooperativeness", investigating five different styles of conflict: competing (assertive, uncooperative), avoiding (unassertive, uncooperative), accommodating (unassertive, cooperative), collaborating (assertive, cooperative), and compromising (intermediate assertiveness and cooperativeness). Participants can measure their behavior in conflict situations and interpret the mode(s) most prevalent for them. For educators, researchers, and those interested in communication and its relationship to conflict, this tool provided ground for discussion and reflection far beyond the transmission model. The complexity of human "modes" of behavior and habits or styles of communication challenges the linear analysis of communication. When people are "typed" into neat boxes and personality descriptions, it can give them a handy starting place to discuss differences and possible commonalities. When these style inventories become a bit more complex, with opportunities to see nuances and distinctions among categories, people may feel freer to explore collaboration and a path forward with the "other." Within the confines of a strict typology, people may feel unsafe, labeled, and stuck in a set of characteristics. The Thomas-Kilmann Instrument offers the labels but begins to offer a bit more flexibility with the two different axes from low to high. Now people can identify and possibly chose strategies for dealing with conflict in communication.

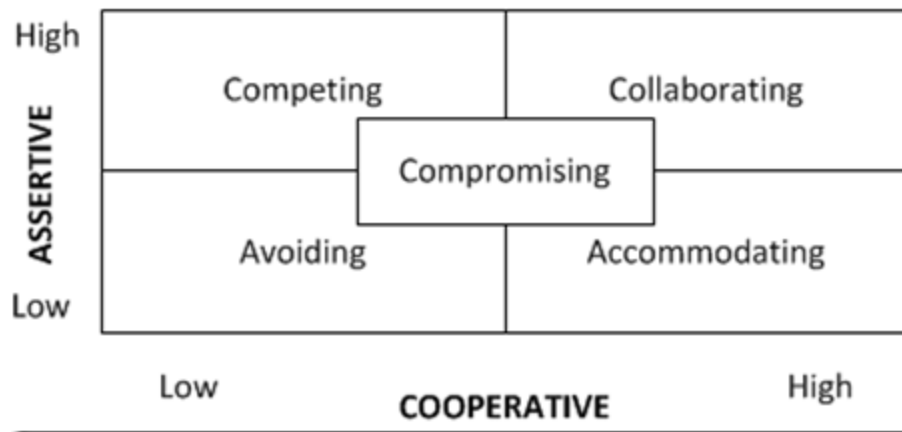


Figure 1: Thomas-Kilmann (1974) Conflict Mode Instrument

One of the few other early mentions of communication and its relationship to conflict came from Kurt Lewin, a leading psychologist of the 20th century, who imagined life as a field of forces that push and pull us from point to point. His famous field theory (Lewin, 1935) depicted human beings as living within a lifespace of many, sometimes unseen, factors that work together in an interdependent way to influence behavior. Field theory is very helpful in capturing the often-conflicted nature of human life. Although human actions are goal-directed, goals are not always consistent, and there may be personal and social forces that pull people in different directions.

Goal conflict occurs when people are unsure what they want to do. In field theory, this means being both pulled and/or pushed in different directions based on the combination of factors facing us, including demands, constraints, needs, and values. Lewin identified four types of goal conflict commonly encountered in the lifespace. The first is an *approach-approach conflict*, in which two goals are equally attractive, but people can't achieve both. This is a classic dilemma of not being able to choose. A person could major in accounting or management, both of which seem equally valuable to them. The second is an *approach-avoidance conflict*, in which a goal has both positive and negative consequences. A person might want to major in accounting, which would result in a high-paying job, but it would take an

extra year of college so she can't decide. The third kind of conflict from field theory is *avoidance-avoidance*, where two goals are equally unattractive. For example, parents expect their child to major in business, either accounting or management, but the child finds both fields boring. The fourth is a *double approach-avoidance conflict*, in which two goals each have advantages and disadvantages.

Lewin introduced the possibility of resolving goal conflict in 1935, and pondered field theory as a means to tie the academic field of communication to studies about human conflict. Later what was learned is that goal conflict management is a process of weighing options or stewing about what one thinks will happen if they take a certain course of action. People now resolve these conflicts regularly, though some are more difficult than others. They also can live with goal conflicts for considerable periods of time hoping that the problem will eventually solve itself, which it often does because human lifespace changes. New goals appear, old forces die out, and human needs, wants, and values change. But that was not a regular topic of focus in the 1970s.

The focus of communication and conflict in the 1970s did mirror Wolfe's image of the "Me" decade as being self-centered and withdrawing from the community focus of the previous decade. The transmission model of communication privileged the speaker and marginalized the listener. As the decade progressed, communication theorists began to wonder about the role relationships played in managing conflict and set the stage for a move to privileging community.

Social construction. The formal tie between the development of social construction theory and the field of communication may have begun in the 1970s. Some of the earliest history of formation for the commitment to social construction theory came from two significant books: *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, by Irving Goffman (1959), and *The Social*

Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge, by Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1966). The 1970s then became a time for pioneers to build on those books and their premises. Kenneth Gergen was such a pioneer then, as he moved to produce two bold contributions: “Social Psychology as History” (Gergen, 1973) and "Toward Generative Theory" (Gergen, 1978).

Goffman analyzed the relationship between performance and life. He broke ground by looking at face-to-face interaction and said that people choose to put a positive image of themselves in front of others to get a favorable impression from them. Reciprocally, those viewing this “performance” (the audience) are watching carefully in order to foster their own impression. This metaphor of theatrical performance indicates that the social context of actors and audience constructs a social identity. People cooperate in performance by working in teams to unify the social construction of identity and reduce the possibility of dissent (as the performers keep up their unified offering, relying on each other). Impression management becomes a strong force, even for negative impressions. Goffman’s work invited scholars and practitioners to begin to investigate the notion that there is no objectively valid, universal reality independent of people's social actions.

Many say that Goffman and Berger and Luckmann were “way ahead of their time” as they dove into a new cross-disciplinary school of social science: social construction. In *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*, Berger and Luckman (1966) suggest that social institutions are constructed by humans. Before this book, much of the writing and thought about communication was that it was a “thing” that transmitted information, or it was merely a tool to describe things. Now, many disciplines, especially psychology and sociology, could see communication as an object of investigation, a focus on questions such as:

What is the product of social action? How does the continued interaction produce patterns of communication that are continually reconstructed? The term “social construction” was coined in the late 1960s and 1970s (even though some, such as Barnett Pearce, say it is really a new name for an old set of ideas—see reflecting the 1970s for more discussion). This theoretical approach to communication assumes that humans jointly create (construct) the understandings and meanings they give to social encounters. In other words, we create our social world in our communication.

Berger and Luckmann (1966) said that instead of focusing on theory to understand our world, individuals should look at what they know and what they are creating by their face-to-face communication. “Everyday life presents itself as a reality interpreted by men and subjectively meaningful to them as a coherent world (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 19),” is their suggestion about how to organize the everyday life around people. Berger and Luckmann point to a society’s criteria of knowledge and how it is developed in order to begin to identify one’s reality. The primary means that humans categorize their view of the world is through semiotics—the use of signs that include gestures, body language, artifacts, and language. A sign is anything that has an “explicit intention to serve as an index of subjective meaning” (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 50).

Ken Gergen is currently a Senior Research Professor at Swarthmore College, the Chairman of the Board of the Taos Institute, and an adjunct professor at Tilburg University. Each decade since the late 1960s contained his writing and contributions to social construction, but it was in the 1970s that Gergen began discussing the “relational view of self,” which notes that all knowledge is generated within relationships. In 1973, with his article, “Social Psychology as History,” *some* say his “radical” view emerged. Gergen (1973) offered that most social

psychology is really “an historical inquiry,” because human behavior changes over time.

Theories are the product of historical and cultural circumstances not visa versa. As culture changes, theoretical premises are altered. The relational view becomes important when theorists are asked to take the focus off the individual mind and instead be concerned with relational processes. These processes play out in interactions that influence understandings of self and other, which can construct our way of being with others and, finally, create our reality.

In 1978, Gergen’s article “Toward Generative Theory” was published and further contributed to the social construction discussion. If communicators create social life, then theory gives the potential to open new spaces of action, rather than looking for truth and pragmatic outcomes. Theory that lets go of the need for verification and established facts has a better chance to restructure social life. Gergen began a tradition of generative theory that gives inquiry a capacity to generate essential questions about social life by questioning the “truths” or facts of a culture (Gergen, 1978).

Decade reflection. What was created in the 1970s?

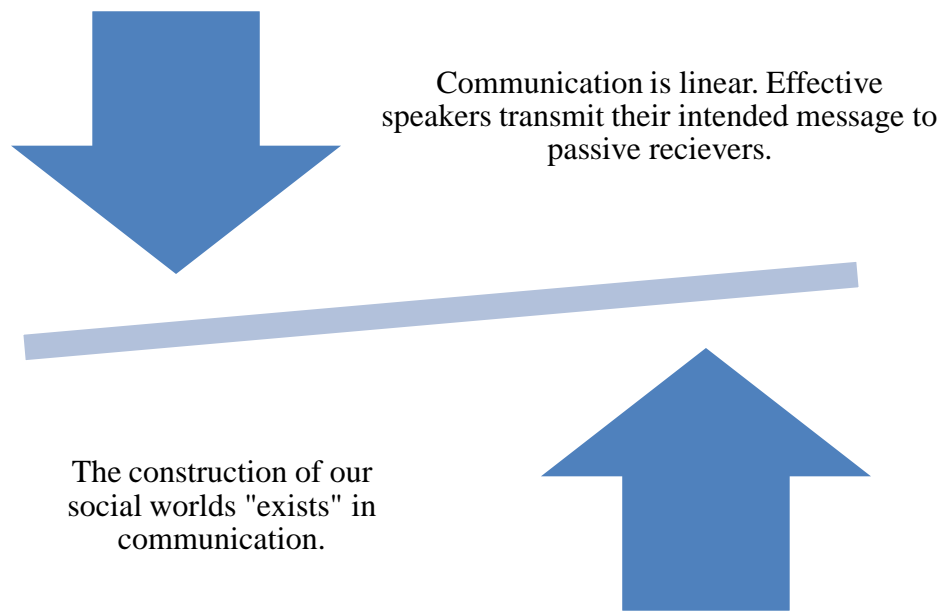


Figure 2: Depicts the balance of perspectives about the role of communication in social life.

Could this have been the decade where communication was “discovered”? The delicate balance shown in this figure reacted to pressure by theorists and educators as they wrestled with problems and solutions, wondering where communication breakdowns occur. This stress in the 1970s showed up notably in a famous “conversation,” the Gergen-Schlenker debate, which revolved around the meaning and use of sociological research. While Ken Gergen saw that context was a part of everything in social life, Barry Schlenker saw that social science knowledge could be researched, predicted, and produced generalizable results. Schlenker’s criticism spurred discussion about the principles of social interaction (Gergen, 1976).

One consequence of that debate was what Barnett Pearce (1989) called a “revolutionary discovery” that communication is central to what it means to be a human. Pearce (1989) offered,

Some social scientists claim the “world” exists in communication, that the apparently stable events/objects of the social world—from economic systems to personality traits to “dinner with friends” —are collectively constructed in patterns of communication; and

that the “solution” to (some? most? all?) problems consists in changing the conversations we have about them (p.3).

Implications for me. So, how did this research and writing affect my practice (skills, methods, writing, and teaching)? Since I was an undergraduate student throughout most of the decade, I had just begun to ponder the significance of the human communication. I chose the discipline as a major when I gained a stronger commitment to speaking and listening respectfully, knowing that the results would affect (improve) my relationships. But during the 1970s, I could not tie that understanding into a concept. I was still in the throes academically of the transmission model of communication. Opportunities for public speaking were offered to me quite often, and I practiced long and hard to “deliver” a message that I hoped would be received without much interference. I had begun my reflexive journey.

Much later in life I saw a bumper sticker that read, “Conversation is like competition, and the loser is the listener.” For me, the 1970s was an era that promoted the *winning speaker*. Communication competence was the implicit and explicit goal of my undergraduate studies in the 1970s. I had been a great public speaker in high school, and now felt the smooth transition to college knowing that by building my communication skills, I could continue to speak well and persuade others. After all, I fared well in competitive speech tournaments in high school, gave the speech at graduation, and spoke more than listened to my peers and family. As a young woman coming from a small rural town, I rarely thought about career options and did not really wonder what job I could find with these skills. So, what was I prepared for? I did not start my consulting work until 10 years later, and knew I was amassing a toolkit for the hypodermic needle model of communication. I could prepare effective messages, choose appropriate

channels for my message to travel, and then would hope that the listener received the intended message satisfactorily.

1980s: The Cheesy Decade

“That’s so 80s” is a phrase used to signify the cheesy music, fashion, hair, makeup, and movies of the decade. Cheesy is a subjective term, but in urban lingo it means unsubtle or inauthentic. Mullet hairdos (short on top and long in back) were popular for men, as well as the big poufy hair for women. Disco music fell out of fashion, but the new “synthpop” music was criticized for its lack of emotion, with its main instrument being the electric synthesizer. The decade began with the murder of John Lennon and election of Ronald Reagan as president for eight of the 10 years. Of utmost significance in this decade was the emergence of home electronics (Walton, 2006):

- 1981: IBM introduced a complete desktop personal computer.
- 1982: The Weather Channel and CNN debuted.
- 1984: The user-friendly Apple Macintosh went on sale.
- 1985: Microsoft launched Windows.
- 1980s: Hardware and software changes evolved into electronic bulletin boards later becoming the Internet.
- 1980s: Cellular mobile phones were introduced.

During the 1980s we also saw international unrest as Chinese students protested in Tiananmen Square, famine erupted in Ethiopia, world powers boycotted the 1980 and 1984 Olympics, and many South American countries returned to democracy after dictatorships and the end of the cold war.

Existing in a decade that was socially cheesy and internationally unsteady, the communication academic discipline began to recognize conflict resolution as a topic that needed attention. Increasing “aha” moments occurred with Fisher and Ury’s *Getting to Yes* (1981), which invited us to separate the people from the problem. Human empowerment and seeds for conceptual change were invited by Pearce and Cronen’s (1980) birth of the *Coordinated Management of Meaning* (CMM). CMM told us that we actually create meaning by interpreting what is happening around us. Ken Gergen introduced a whole new way to think about theory, called “generative theory.” In contrast to traditional empirical methods, Gergen saw social science as a way to unite theory with practice by socially constructing meaning and worlds. His book, *Toward Transformation in Social Knowledge*, helped communicators and researchers release the traditional demand for scientific observation and research (Gergen, 1982).

During the 1970s and 1980s, Michael Foucault, French philosopher and social theorist, led the transformation later called the “narrative turn.” Foucault used the metaphor of “archeology” to show how a traditional history of ideas (a long list of historical facts that lead to conclusions) can be replaced by showing that multiple pasts and different connections among them lead to continuously transforming discourses (Foucault, 1972).

The contributions of Fisher and Ury, Pearce and Cronen, Gergen, and Foucault began a relationship that continues to exist strongly and confidently today. In the 1980s, those who studied and practiced in the world of communication and conflict first began to utilize social construction as a way to organize and conceptualize their work.

Communication and conflict. During the 1970s, anyone who wanted to negotiate (communicate) for what they wanted would utilize the transmission model. Negotiators had to amass their power sources to “transmit” information that would change minds or influence

people toward their own goals. If the intended message was not received, the channel was examined, or occasionally blame was put on the receiver (“they must not be listening”). This type of negotiation was often called “hard” or “fixed” negotiation, where an assumed “pie” with only a certain number of pieces existed. The power-based communication was necessary to make sure one got the pieces of pie desired. For example, if two parties were communicating over the use of prime office space in a workplace (these conversations were beginning to be seen as “conflict”), the finite pie would have two pieces: one prime office space and everything else as the not-prime-office-space. The hard negotiation would ensue, with both parties trying to get the one slice of pie—the one prime office space. This method of communication, or negotiation, became the root of many unsatisfied communicators. Usually these negotiations resulted in a winner and a loser and in some cases, everyone a loser. The transmission communication model seemed to be all about power when used in cases of conflict or differences over finite resources.

Getting to yes. Roger Fisher and Bill Ury (1981) entered the scene waving an “enlarge the pie” flag. Their book, *Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving in*, resonated soundly with those wondering about the creation and resolution of conflict. Though only a handful of academics were connecting the word “conflict” with the ability to communicate effectively, the emerging field of mediation took notice. Fisher and Ury offered hope that principled negotiation or interest-based negotiation was a method for not only creating more pieces of the pie, but to develop win-win solutions, where people could walk away from their negotiations satisfied. How do people in conflict envision the hope of principled negotiation? How can the pie be expanded? Fisher and Ury (1981, pp.13-49) offered five propositions, followed by brief discussion of each.

1. Separate the people from the problem.

2. Focus on interests, not positions.
3. Invent options for mutual gain.
4. Insist on using objective criteria.
5. Know your BATNA (Best Alternative To Negotiated Agreement).

Could the two folks in the workplace set aside their emotions and other relationship issues from the substantive fact that there is a desired office space in question? When Fisher and Ury speak of *separating the people from the problem*, they invite a change in perception. If people could acknowledge that each communicator perceives different realities interpreted in various ways depending on the situation, they could also acknowledge that setting aside perceptions the substantive issue at hand would remain. Emotions and personal relational issues—status, trust, fear, love, anxiety, reputation, and guilt—could be intertwined with the selection of office space. One way to separate the people from the problem is to use a skill called “framing,” which describes the issue in a way that invites quality communication. Think of the difference between the following two frames:

Frame #1: Which one of us should get the preferable office space?

Frame #2: How can we choose office spaces so we all meet our needs for effective, efficient, and healthy working environments?

Frame #1 offers only limited pieces of the pie. There is a preferable office and one person gets it. Frame #2 opens up the conversation, hinting that the problem is more of a workplace office issue. It is important to make sure people have an office that suits them well, and the idea is to focus on a process where appropriate office spaces are assigned. The pie now includes other possibilities, such as conversations about how to create effective and efficient working

conditions and what constitutes a healthy workplace. During these conversations, people find out more clearly what really means the most to them, which points to the next proposition.

Negotiating about positions (proposition #2) fits in well with the transmission model of the 70s. The assumption is that people know what they want, and they need to craft a really powerful message to convince others to give them what they want. Fisher and Ury saw those “wants” as positions. Positional negotiating (sometimes called positional bargaining) often lead to dead-ends, as the power plays just get stronger and louder, leading to hurt feelings and deeper conflict. Fisher and Ury said that there are “interests” beneath those positions, which are the needs that really motivate people. By *focusing on interests rather than positions* people have an opportunity to investigate within themselves why they are taking the position they hold. Often it turns out that the underlying reasons; the true interests are actually compatible and not mutually exclusive. Two parties may both have a position, “I want *that* office space.” Their interests may work together: one wants a space with a large window to get fresh air, while the other wants a space closer to the manager in order to collaborate on projects. With those interests in mind the pie is now larger, and a whole variety of office space opportunities arise.

Once people can be engaged in focusing on interests and committing to interest-based negotiation, they can move into the third proposition—*invent options for mutual gain*. Introduced in Chapter Two as “second-order change,” this proposition is a shift to a change in the meaning of winning rather than a change in the circumstance. The people in communication look for new solutions to their problem and for a way for both sides to win. They do not fight over positions. So, Frame #2 above asks for a win-win. A focus on processes for mutual gain invites second order change.

Once the perceptual shift toward win-win is in place, negotiators can ask about the criteria they want to use to make decisions. The fourth proposition *is to insist on objective criteria for decisions*. In the workplace example, negotiators can ask, “How have we made other decisions about workplace office assignments?” That question introduces decision-making criteria that might have been useful in the past. If it was not useful, it still may point to other criteria that could work in this case. This gives both sides more guidance as to what is “fair,” and makes it hard to oppose offers within this framing. Another way to insist on those criteria is to ask, “Can we have a discussion in order to create criteria with which to make this decision?”

Finally, Fisher and Ury (1981) offered us the acronym that has served the negotiation field for many decades now. It is helpful to ask parties about their alternatives. If everyone shares their BATNA (*best alternative to negotiated agreement*), then the temptation to accept an agreement that is far worse than what one might have gotten, or reject one that is far better than one might otherwise achieve, is minimized. Negotiators are instructed to know and improve on BATNA before any negotiation is concluded.

In *Getting to Yes*, Fisher and Ury (1981) have offered an approach that leads to excellent communication in conflicts. In the 1980s, the language used concerning human differences—in attitude, perception, goals, needs, wants—commonly identified those differences as “disputes.” The goal in the 1980s was to “resolve” those disputes. Resolution with a win-win approach gave hope for happier and more satisfied communicators. The use of both words “dispute” and “resolution” were the focus of discussion later in the 1980s and 1990s.

Coordinated Management of Meaning. At the same time that Fisher and Ury rocked the communication and conflict world with interest-based negotiation, Pearce and Cronen (1980) suggested that we look *at* the process of communication, rather than *use* communication as a tool

to investigate other things. The creation of the *Coordinated Management of Meaning* (CMM) theory shook up the transmission communicators mightily. If the focus was to be on communication between people, and *not* on the strength of one person's message, then communicators begin to experience the empowerment of creating their own social reality. Communicators coordinate with others to make meaning. Though Pearce and Cronen were working on CMM in the 1970s, it was in 1980 that their book *Communication, Action and Meaning: The Creation of Social Realities* introduced many communication theorists to CMM (Pearce & Cronen, 1980).

With the simpler yet powerful moniker, “the communication perspective,” CMM positioned communicators to realize that what they do *in the moment* does not lead to descriptions of cultural or social or organizational truths but rather describes the process with which these events are made. The famous question that arose from this theory is, “What are we making together?” That question and the invitation to take the “communication perspective” bridged the faint (but seemingly huge in the 1980s) gap between theory and practice. For consultants and practitioners, it was monumental to imagine asking clients to see themselves as persons who act into unfinished situations, thereby giving them the empowerment and freedom missing from the expert model in transmission communication. Speech acts and other types of communication are now seen as generative (note the coordination of Pearce, Cronen, and Gergen)—a way of making rather than just doing things. Pearce later said (Pearce, 2007, p.xiii) not to let the word “theory” glaze over the eyes. CMM is a practically useful way of being, where critical moments occur between people that change the context and change the world. In conflict management practice, interveners see that those in conflict often see the same situation differently and assign different meanings to particular events and words.

Social construction. It is important to link the *Coordinated Management of Meaning* from the communication and conflict writing and practice to the emergence of social construction. Pearce and Cronen (1980) and their colleagues at the University of Massachusetts did more than develop an appealing theory; they developed a *practical theory* (explored more fully in the 1990s section). In my book with Stephen Littlejohn, *Engaging Communication in Conflict: Systemic Practice* (Littlejohn & Domenici, 2001), CMM was recounted as a contribution in the 1980s that sees communication as a process of coordination in which the parties must make sense of and mesh their respective actions into a coherent whole. Each communicator may understand what is happening very differently, but the parties feel successful to the extent that their actions are seen as organized.

When human beings encounter any situation, they naturally assign meaning to what they experience. Objects, events, sights, sounds, images and words are never just things in themselves. Rather, they represent, bring to mind, or elicit some meaning. Meaning, however, is never singular; it is always multiple and continually embedded in context. In other words, any experience will have more than one possible meaning for people, and any given meaning arises from some context. The same word or action in a different context will have a different meaning. Those meanings are never inherent in the symbol but are worked out socially between people through interaction. Our meanings arise out of interaction with others over a lifetime.

Take the case of a newly married couple who are assembling their combined vitamin pills. She has learned and experienced all her life that the human body, when at its top condition, is sufficient onto itself. Her body is strong and she intends to keep it that way, using all tools at her disposal. She eats healthy foods, gets exercise and adequate sleep, and focuses on positive thoughts and beauty. She takes a multi-vitamin each day to add to these “well-being” tools that

she has developed throughout her life. The husband grew up in a family that was obsessed with the notion that nasty viruses and bacteria are all over, just waiting to get into the human body. Once inside, they will attack and debilitate the body to the point of death. He takes vitamins as part of his fearful focus, hoping that with enough vitamins he can fight those viruses. She has a well-being story, and he has a fear-of-illness-and-death story. The vitamin pills sit neutrally on the shelf, objects that invite many possible meanings to different folks based on their history, attitudes, stories, and relationships. Over the years this couple may negotiate these meanings to eventually come to an understanding or way to coordinate their communication about the vitamins. Or possibly, they may not come to an understanding and feel tense about the differences in the meanings they give to their intake of vitamins.

Generative theory. Those who were scratching their heads in the 1980s wondering how to manage (“resolve” was the word used back then) the differences that became wedges between family members, workplace colleagues, competitive industries, and countries with limited resources felt a breath of fresh air when Gergen and his social construction colleagues invited us to consider that *communicators can transform their social lives*. With a “relational” view of self (we make meaning by collaborating with others, thus our sense of self is defined and negotiated in human interaction), a plethora of choices suddenly came into view. People *can* change communication patterns in order to create a new relationship. The transmission model no longer serves as one-way communication emphasizes the individual mind, with limited capacity to transform relationships and meaning. The negotiation of self with others no longer privileges a speaker with an intended meaning hoping to get the intended message across with little interference. The relational view invites ongoing communication on a variety of levels that define and redefine who we are. When the wife described above took her vitamins in celebration

of her strength, she noticed her husband hurrying to take his vitamins when he heard someone cough or sneeze. As they discussed their differing views about vitamin ingestion, they were surprised and challenged. They both received new information about their own “selves” (she privileged well-being, and he protected his body from harm) and coordinated or adjusted their views to make sure their life together was smooth and without conflicting beliefs. In fact, they could even create and then implement a way of being together, possibly choosing one of their health beliefs or even creating a new one that transcended both.

Gergen demonstrated that basic scientific assumptions long held are not appropriate in social psychology (i.e., using prediction and control to study society and culture). Instead, in the late 1970s, he began to state that researchers have the “capacity to challenge the guiding assumptions of the culture, to raise the fundamental questions regarding contemporary social life, to foster reconsideration of that which is ‘taken for granted’ and thereby furnish new alternatives for social action” (Gergen, 1978, p. 1346). What did the invitation to *reconsider that which is taken for granted* allow researchers and communicators to do? It allowed the possibility to alter social reality with new choices, images, models, and metaphors that could lead to new actions. This type of quest is an *inquiry* that is generative when new ideas arise, compelling people to act in new ways. It is important to note that at this time, Ken Gergen’s leadership in social construction was established.

Decade reflection. During the 80s I graduated from college and entered into my child-raising years. My first son born in 1981, and I jumped into a form of parenting that mirrored the communication commitments explored in my college days. “That’s so 80s” illuminated my life. My hair was in a mullet at first and later changed to the Farrah Fawcett iconic “feathered” look. I was mostly oblivious to politics and world events and more concerned with communicating with

my kids in a way that would lead to health and happiness. In 1980, a book was published that assisted mothers like me in that quest and helped me further explore the question I was left with after the 70s: *What does the transmission model of communication create? And with what could I replace it?* Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish (1980) wrote the book of the generation, which is in its third edition today and used by postmodern parents. *How to Talk so Kids Will Listen and Listen so Kids Will Talk* (Faber & Mazlish, 1980) offers communication principles that are based on respect, empathy, and love. Rather than criticizing children's behavior and demeaning them, we were advised to create a pattern where parents attempt to understand how a child feels, thereby establishing trust and openness, and finally developing a way to design together the path forward. Even as I write these words now, I see how consistent this communication choice has been for me as a parent, a partner, a professional, and an educator.

As the decade progressed, I began to give workshops and classes on effective parenting communication. This perspective I held was not popular with everyone; in fact, many parents called this way of parenting "spoiling the child" and even hinting at "abusing" the child, because it seemed to many that limits were not set and enforced. But as I saw my children evolve as open, honest, and emotionally mature, I felt happy that I had not endured with the "transmission model" of parenting. The following two scenarios depict the difference. I call one type of parenting "collaborative" and the other "transmission."

Issue: Young child complaining of being hungry.

Transmission model

Child: I'm hungry!

Parent: You can't be hungry; you just ate 10 minutes ago.

Child: I am *really* hungry!

Parent: Stop whining, you are just trying to get my attention.

Child: But Mom! I want to get something to eat.

Parent: We will eat at dinnertime. I know you can't be hungry so soon after lunch.

Collaborative Model

Child: I'm hungry!

Parent: Wow, you sound very concerned! Tell me more.

Child: My tummy feels funny, and I want to eat!

Parent: OK, it sounds like you feel hungry. What is that feeling like?

Child: It feels funny, like it needs food in it.

Parent: Well, I would like to help you make your tummy feel better, let's talk about how we could do that.

Child: Put food in it.

Parent: Yes! That sounds like one way to help it feel better. Are there any other ways?

Child: Take a drink of water, and then see if it feels better.

Parent: Gee, what a great idea you came up with. Let me get you some water, and then after you drink it, we will talk about how you are feeling.

Child: OK, thanks, Mom.

This example might seem time-consuming and silly, but the difference in the communication pattern that is being created is huge. If we want children to know that, as parents, we listen to them, respect their feelings, and believe them, they will trust adults and others more easily. Also, including the children in the creation of ways to move forward in life and addressing their challenging situations give them more ownership and commitment to the decision. The previous

example showed some communication choices with a young child. The next example might occur in communication with a teenager.

Issue: Where can the teen park his or her car.

Transmission model

Teen: I keep getting blocked in each morning by everyone else's cars. I want to park in the driveway!

Parent: You have to park on the side of the house with the other cars. We parents need to have the driveway to bring groceries and stuff into the house, so we need to be close.

Teen: Why do you always get what is best? I want to park in the driveway and be closer to the house.

Parent: No, since you are the child, and a new driver, you will park where we tell you.

Collaborative model

Teen: I keep getting blocked in each morning by everyone else's cars. I want to park in the driveway!

Parent: You sure have a lot of energy about all aspects of driving now that you have your license! Tell me more about parking—what is important to you?

Teen: I want to park in the driveway.

Parent: Hmm, we have a great issue to address here. With four drivers in our family, it is challenging to work out parking. What do you suggest?

Teen: Let me park in the driveway.

Parent: You really want to park in your preferred spot! Can you help me figure out a way to address this issue so all the drivers in the family are satisfied, *including you*?

Teen: Let's make a map of all the possible parking places and talk about it with Dad and Lucy later tonight.

Parent: Great idea! I think you are amazing the way you create ways of being together that might work for all of us. Thanks. I know we will come up with something that makes you happy.

So, what are the principles driving this type of communication? Since I did not save any of my teaching notes from the 1980s, I can only look at what was created based on this commitment. A decade later I began putting together some thoughts for a mediation book, which later became a significant collaboration with Stephen Littlejohn.

Implications for me. In the late 1980s I began my first community college teaching job. Hired with a Bachelor's degree in communication to teach public speaking was a great opportunity. I taught for a few years in anticipation of applying for graduate school in communication at the University of New Mexico. Questions that were bubbling up in me throughout the 1970s and 1980s revolved mainly around the direction my communication commitments would lead if I diverted from the transmission model. If I were serious about the recent theory I had read from Ken Gergen about creating my social world, what would I teach my students about public speaking? I had heard about the work of Karen Foss, Sonja Foss, and Cindy Griffin, which discussed the limits of persuasive communication methods and began to offer a new perspective called invitational rhetoric. Later I was introduced to the invitational rhetoric focus (Foss & Griffin, 1995) in the context of teaching public speaking in the 1990s. I still used traditional public speaking textbooks for teaching community college classes, where we highlighted persuasive speaking (as well as informative and entertaining speaking), but I was wondering about the frontiers of rhetoric where the intention was not to *change* the behavior or

attitudes of listeners. It was not until I began graduate school and had the chance to delve deeper into those frontiers that I could understand my dissatisfaction with the transmission model.

1990s: The Peaceful Decade

The 1990s were seen by many Western nations as a time of peace and prosperity with the ending of the cold war. U.S. President George H.W. Bush and United Kingdom Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher in the early 1990s crafted the term “peace dividend” to describe the economic benefit of decreasing defense spending. The two world leaders wanted defense spending to be at least partially redirected to social programs. The U.S. was involved in the Gulf War early in the decade and worldwide there were scattered conflicts, with terrorist groups becoming more sophisticated and destructive. During Bill Clinton’s presidency (1993-2001), a time of economic expansion and the doubling of personal incomes emerged. President Clinton’s approval rating was the highest of any president since WWII, but he was the first president to be impeached since Andrew Johnson, though the Senate later acquitted him (Martin, 1996).

This peaceful decade also saw the worldwide Web (originally one word) lead the technology industry, spurring on great scientific and technological innovations, including smartphones, memory cards, and webcams. The 1990s provided the foundation for the information age, with the whole world getting closer together. Throughout the 1990s Larry Page and Sergey Brin were putting together plans for Google, incorporating the company in 1998. Beginning in a friend’s garage, Google then had over 10,000 queries a day and quickly gained a reputation as a trustworthy source of information. By 1999, it was serving 500,000 queries a day and the company moved to their megaplex headquarters in Mountain View, California (Battelle, 2005).

The decade also had its share of disasters, both natural and imagined. The preparation for the Y2K bug (which turned out to be a dud) mobilized the country, ending a decade of hurricanes

(Andrew in South Florida in 1992), the 1994 Northridge earthquake in Los Angeles, a heat wave in 1995 which saw temperatures peak at 106 °F in the Midwest U.S., where 739 people died in Chicago alone. The Gulf War precipitated an oil spill that caused considerable damage to wildlife in the Persian Gulf, especially in areas surrounding Kuwait and Iraq.

It seems ironic—but probably isn’t—that the “peaceful” decade is the same era when the focus on communication and conflict began to really merge academically and in practice. It was the decade that established the Public Conversations Project (www.publicconversations.org/), the Public Dialogue Consortium (www.publicdialogue.org/) and the Taos Institute (www.taosinstitute.net/). These three organizations, along with many others, took the social construction invitation seriously. If humans can create their social worlds through communication, then conflict situations have much to gain. If persons can create conflict, they can also create lack-of-conflict. The decade began with mediation bursting on the scene as a means to “resolve” (early 90s) conflict, and the decade ended offering that we could “transform” conflict. Voices that began to link conflict management with social construction wrote books, created organizations, performed research, and practiced the concepts in relationship with others, both professionally and personally. In this exploration of the 1990s, this section begins with an overview of the three organizations, followed by conceptual contributions of the decade, with implications for communication and conflict and social construction. It will end with my reflections on the peaceful decade and examples of perspectives and practice in addressing those reflections.

Organizations. Founded in 1989, the Public Conversation Project (PCP) was a project of the Family Institute of Cambridge. The PCP was created when a televised debate on abortion caused Laura Chasin to question how family therapy practices could improve polarized

conversations about abortion and other public issues. In 1996, with an initial grant from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the PCP became a stand-alone 501(c) (3) nonprofit organization. The organization offered a series of dialogues for ordinary citizens on the topic of abortion. This was followed by trainings, retreats, articles, and public dialogues on a variety of issues over the years, such as forest management, sexuality, culture, race, and other contentious issues. The PCP utilized practices from family therapy, psychology, social construction, dialogue, and deliberation and has received awards for its contributions to the field of alternative dispute resolution. Many of the skills, methods, and examples that are explored in this manuscript come from the PCP's innovative work.

The Public Dialogue Consortium (PDC) was formed in 1995 to transform public dialogue for the public good. A group of educators, consultants and practitioners developed a structure to work with diverse communities to bring multiple perspectives into public engagement processes. The PDC specializes in communication that builds trust, enables all segments of the community to be heard and respected, and builds the ability to learn from human differences. Addressing city planning, healthcare, education policy, land use, and many other high profile public issues, the PDC "facilitated" (rather than "directed") processes where high quality communication was the basis for collaboration. The PDC held social construction as an underlying commitment and made great contributions to the world of conflict management. Again, there will be more on the PDC's contributions later in this manuscript.

The final organization highlighted here that formed in the 1990's is the Taos Institute. The first conference convened by the Taos Institute was in 1993, where a group of educators and practitioners committed to social constructionist ideas met in Taos, New Mexico, to explore and look more carefully at these ideas. Founders Harlene Anderson, David Cooperrider, Mary

Gergen, Kenneth Gergen, Sheila McNamee, Suresh Srivastva and Diana Whitney created a “space” of learning (in contrast to a learning “place”), which expands in many directions both conceptually and geographically. The founders’ work and contributions were honored in 2013 at the Taos Institute’s 20th anniversary celebration. The Taos Institute’s central focus over the last 20 years is found in its mission: *Constructionist theory and practice locates the source of meaning, value and action in the relational connection among people. It is through relational processes that we create the world in which we most want to live and work.* The Taos Institute space provides much of the inspiration for this manuscript.

These three organizations and their leaders provided the backdrop for a period of merging, when those involved in communication and conflict study and practice began to privilege the idea from social construction that we can create our worlds through our communication. Though described separately in the following sections, the interweaving becomes clear in the 90s.

Communication and conflict. This peaceful decade saw a burst of change in both the academic front as well as the practitioner arena. In the early 1990s the field of communication was tying together communication and conflict, with the bold goal of asserting conflict as a communication breakdown. That idea has held on to the present but has been challenged on a variety of fronts, namely the more legalistic fields that say conflict is a matter of right and wrong and thus belongs in a discipline where people specialize in digging to find out who is right, who is guilty, who is to blame, and who pays for the injustice. This cycle of “conflict comes from a communication breakdown” versus “conflict comes from someone messing up” invited the solidification of terms such as “dispute resolution” and “conflict resolution.” Those terms created a binary effect, further upholding the view that a conflict is a problem to be resolved, hopefully by someone who can help the parties figure out who messed up.

On the other hand, communication theorists, following the rise of textbooks and articles featuring communication methods to resolve (later “manage”) conflict, occasionally looked to the field of negotiation as a basis for communication and conflict studies. The following exploratory journey from negotiation, through mediation, empowerment, and finally transcendence, comes primarily from my books with Stephen Littlejohn: *Communication, Conflict, and the Management of Difference* (2007), *Engaging Communication in Conflict* (2001), and *Mediation: Empowerment in Conflict Management* (2001). The purpose of this journey is to provide a historical flavor of the focus of communication, conflict, and social construction by looking at the journey’s evolution from negotiation through transformation.

Negotiation. Negotiation is a conversation where two or more parties attempt to work out their disparate issues through communication. When people are experiencing their human differences as challenging or harmful, they negotiate to find a path forward, allowing the differences to be valued and serve as the basis for creating positive steps forward. Humans negotiate for something every day. Whether consulting with their boss, hoping for a raise, or discussing a proposal for border control, differences are being managed by a back-and-forth communication aimed to resolve the issue at hand. More formal negotiations occur in business and professional environments, where parties meet at a bargaining table and use communication skills to try to “get what they want.” The essential ingredient in effective negotiation is the ability to communicate well amidst the human differences at hand. In negotiation, participants do not use an intermediary, but they experience control over the process and the outcome of the discussion.

Illuminated the earlier recap of the 80’s was Roger Fisher and William Ury’s (1980) introduction of interest-based negotiation as a means of working toward mutual gains, or “win-

win” solutions. Compared to positional-bargaining, which is focused on competing wants and demands, interest-based or *principled* negotiation is based on the interests or the needs *behind* what people say they want. Consider the case of two siblings fighting over an orange. Both children want the orange, and the parent has to decide what to do. Treated as a zero-sum game (the resources are finite), the parent might see that the only choice is to cut the orange in half, or perhaps the parent will say, “I will give the orange to the child whose room is the cleanest,” or “I will give the orange to the child who asked me first.” It turns out that one child wanted the orange for juice, while the other child needed to grate the peel to bake a cake. Both *wanted* the orange (their positions), but each *needed* the orange for a different reason (their interests). The key question would have been, “What is it about that orange that makes you want it?”

To prepare for a negotiation, these are some considerations:

Consider what a good outcome would be for both you and for the other side. These outcomes might be discussed at the negotiation table, or they can be determined individually in preparation for the negotiation. People probably already know their “position.” It is most likely the first thing that comes to their mind when they ask themselves “What do I want?” To determine their interests (rather than positions), negotiators can ask themselves, “What is it about this position that makes me want it so much?” For example, they may know that they want \$5,000 for the damage done to their gate when one of their guests accidentally backed into it. That one position may have a variety of interests behind it.

- You may want to preserve (or end) the relationship with that person.
- You want the gate repaired for safety reasons.
- You think that your friend was too flippant about the damage, and \$5,000 would help her realize how important your house and belongings are to you.

- You may be concerned about your friend's drinking problem and see that a large monetary payment would scare him into thinking carefully before drinking and driving.

Identify your BATNA. BATNA is the acronym for the *best alternative to a negotiated agreement*. It is the course of action negotiators pursue if they don't reach an agreement in the negotiation. If they know their BATNA when they enter the negotiation, they will know whether any deal they are discussing makes sense or when they should walk away from the negotiation table. If their position is still that they want \$5,000 for the damaged gate, they may ask themselves, "Am I willing to go to court if I don't get the full \$5,000?" What can they fall back on if they don't get the \$5,000? Maybe they are willing to accept less money. Maybe they are willing to have the other side repair the fence. Maybe they are interested in seeing their friend attend an alcoholism course. Or maybe they are willing to have their friend guarantee that he will never come to their house again. Knowing these alternatives and feeling confident and satisfied with them is a sign of a strong BATNA.

Try to determine the other side's positions, interests, and BATNA. It could be helpful to sit down and actually try to construct these things, either by doing some research or just reasoning out what they might be. In the case of the damaged fence, the other person's position may be a refusal to pay any money. Her interests might be:

- Financial preservation. I am so broke that I need to fight hard to preserve any money I have.
- Reputation. I will look so foolish to everyone if I give in. I want to be seen as a strong negotiator. I don't want anyone to know I had been drinking that night.
- Principle. I am not sure that it was me that damaged the fence. I should not have to pay for something I didn't do.

- Friendship. I would like our friendship to continue but not in the same power structure.

When participating in a negotiation, participants can expect to better know what they want, understand what they are willing to settle for, and know and understand better the other side's needs and goals. They will have a much better grasp of the issue at stake and the alternative solutions available. They might be ready for a third party to assist them in their communication. So with this strong grasp on negotiation methods using communication skills, communication academics and an increasing number of practitioners became acquainted with the ever-increasing field of mediation.

Mediation. Although mediation has been on the scene for many decades, whether in the form of the early Puritan community conflict managers, Native American peacemakers, and even labor union negotiators, it appeared on the horizon in the communication discipline in the early 1990s. The earliest and simplest process description was, : Mediation is a process where a third party facilitates a negotiation process between parties who are experiencing conflict (Domenici & Littlejohn 2001) This definition would change according to the institution using it. For example, mediation in a university law school would probably define mediation as a “dispute resolution” alternative. For the sake of this autoethnography, mediation flows naturally from negotiation. If parties (in the mediation process, “parties” are the participants) are in the midst of or want to attempt a negotiation and feel that assistance is needed to guide the process, they can use a mediation process. When human differences are making their relationship challenging or harmful in some way, negotiation may not be the most accessible option. Mediation offers a safe and effective way to address those differences and gives hope that the differences can finally coexist as valuable resources.

In some of the issues parties face, they may want to have utmost control over the process. If they are trying to figure out a major life decision, such as “should we adopt a child?” they may choose to have the conversation with the help of a mediator. In other cases, they might not have as much control. If parties have a case that has found its way to the courts, such as a car accident, financial problem, or divorce or custody, they might use the court connected mediation service, where mediator(s) are assigned to their case, and the court sets up the logistics. Many contractual relationships, whether employment, consumer relations, construction issues, health care relations, or other relationships where parties are tied by a contract, have agreed upon mediation methods to manage any potential conflicts that may occur.

When parties choose a mediator, they are choosing to become more familiar with their motivations, their interests, and their goals, while exploring the motivations, interests, and goals of the other. Surprising outcomes often result as parties move off positional bargaining and create interest-based solutions.

Empowerment. The focus on parties having control over a communication process and knowing their own interests, goals and motivations spurred on the illumination of empowerment as an aspect of managing conflict using communication. In short, empowerment means having a process that enables participants to express what is most important to them and to do so in a way that can be heard by others. Empowerment means finding the means by which individuals can use their own sources of power—their own best forms of expression—to *say* what they have experienced, what they think, how they feel, what they want, and what matters most to them. Unbridled expression may allow one person to be clear, while stomping on others’ abilities to do the same. For this reason, the process must be one that permits both expression and reception—talking and listening. People are not empowered if others cannot hear or appreciate what they

have to say. In communication processes that address conflict, empowerment may require a variety of things:

- You may need to include opportunities for different forms of expression. Not everyone is empowered by speech. In fact, reticent individuals may find “talking,” especially in large groups, to be intimidating.
- You may have to pay attention to potential problems of domination in which certain individuals want to “set the agenda” or lead the course of the discussion, which can derail attempts to allow everyone the freedom to establish what is important to them.
- You may need to build in a variety of “venues” or structures of dialogue, including, for example, individual writing, dyads, small groups, and large groups.
- Participants may need to have opportunities to revisit and reconsider their ideas, to reality test their ideas, and to change their mind.
- The process may need to include opportunities to get information and increase knowledge.
- Even a clear agenda and focus for discussion can be empowering because it enables people to think clearly about various issues and clarify what is important on each.

The Public Conversations Project offered an effective tool for empowerment called the “go-round.” Using this technique, participants in a dialogue group each take a turn to talk about their experiences or address a question without interruption. The go-round is a listening exercise in which the goal is to express and hear what is important to each person without formulating a response, answer, or rebuttal to what he or she has to say. It encourages listening because they formulate their own “speech” in advance and take their turn when the circle gets to them, so that they are not rehearsing or planning their comments while others are speaking. And for those

who may, for whatever reason, feel they do not want to contribute, a pass rule makes it possible to remain silent without question.

Empowerment in conflict management was a strong contributor to the evolution of the field in the 1990s. Bush and Folger (1994) first wrote about the importance of empowerment and recognition in mediation. As described above, *empowerment* means knowing clearly what is important to you and being able to express this in a way that makes it possible for others to hear. Although, there are people from time to time who are very clear on what they want, but the way in which they express it makes others angry, defensive, and unable to take the point seriously. *Recognition* is the ability to see what is important to others—their feelings, their perspectives, their ideas, their interests. Recognition does not mean agreement, but it does mean that you can say, “I see where you are coming from.”

Empowerment and recognition are twin goals that are always tied to one another. Parties are not truly empowered if others cannot recognize what they are trying to say, and they cannot recognize what is important to others unless they are empowered to express themselves in a way that the other can hear it. These twin goals are vital in most mediations, so the mediator’s work is to help the parties understand their own interests and express what is important to them in a way that makes it possible for each party to at least understand and respect the perspective of the other (Bush & Folger, 1994).

Walking the tightrope of empowerment and recognition can transform our interaction in conflict situations from despair and adversity to hope and possibilities. Consider the following questions and comments:

1. Empowerment: Gee, as we have been talking, I have noticed how strongly I feel about loud parties. I know I like to get a good night's sleep, but I am surprised at how angry I am at being kept awake."
2. Recognition: It sounds like you have a need for safety and security around your home, and feel that a dog gives you exactly what you need since you are out of town so often.
3. Empowerment: I know now that I can face the teacher and request a review of my grades. After this talk, I see how little I know about grading procedures.
4. Recognition: This situation is quite stressful for both of us. I can see that you are just as uncomfortable as I am.

Moral conflict. While the mediation field and the academic focus on communication and conflict were a spotlight in the social sciences, an important contribution came from Barnett Pearce and Stephen Littlejohn. As introduced in Chapter Two, the book, *Moral Conflict: When Social Worlds Collide* (Pearce & Littlejohn, 1997) made the connection between the communication and conflict work to the social construction world in academia. The book introduced conflict as occurring as a context for understanding human difference. Meaning always depends on context. Understanding always requires a reference point. An action that makes perfect sense in one context fails in another, and differences become important or lose significance only within a context of meaning. Within the context of a peaceful neighborhood, people might object to a barking dog; but within the context of personal security, they might actually encourage a dog to bark.

Although human beings create contexts for meaning far too numerous to list, the moral context is especially important for understanding human difference. At the very least, the moral context serves as a reference point for the power of context in shaping meaning and action.

The moral context consists of a set of assumptions about what is right and true across all situations. It is a guiding light that helps people make fundamental decisions about how to think and act. Whenever one behaves according to a general idea of right or wrong, they are acting within the moral context. Whenever one criticizes behavior on the basis of moral violation, they are acting within the moral context. When someone makes a blanket judgment about how things are or should be for the world, they are operating within the moral context.

Here are some examples of assumptions that could be part of a moral context:

1. Mothers must protect their children.
2. God alone has the power to give or take life.
3. People should be allowed to do whatever they want, so long as they do not prevent others from exercising the same right.
4. All cultures are legitimate and worthy of respect.
5. All human beings have certain rights.
6. Good people know their place in society and fulfill their role without question.
7. Humans have dominion over the earth.
8. Mother Earth is sacred and must never be violated.
9. Only through science can we know the truth.

Each of these statements would be part of a more elaborate belief system or set of axioms about what it means to be a person, the place of humanity in the universe, what is valuable, and what constitutes moral action. A coherent and organized set of beliefs about “how things are” constitutes a *moral order*. An important part of a social reality, one’s moral order, is built up over time through interaction in groups, communities, and cultures. A moral order is generally

shared within a moral community. People live in a world of numerous, often clashing moral orders that give rise to two eventualities—confusion and conflict.

Because people live in multiple social worlds and participate in the construction of many moral orders, confusion is common. What is right and what is wrong? What can they rely on? Is anything certain, or is everything relative, and if everything is relative, then how can humans ever know what is right and wrong? Some people respond to this confusion by indecision, even insanity; some respond by embracing relativism; some respond by retreating to a rigid moral order that gives them a feeling of certainty and clarity; and others respond by creating overarching moral orders that enable them to move successfully from one to another.

Systemic practice. During the 1990s, Stephen Littlejohn and I reflected on the evolution of communication and conflict and its impact on our practice. We realized the backbone of much of our practice came from our commitment to systems theory. To best capture this link of theory and practice, we wrote *Engaging Communication in Conflict: Systemic Practice* (Littlejohn & Domenici, 2001). What does it mean to be a systemic practitioner? The book was the result of asking that question and detailing how *talk matters*. Practice is systemic because it draws attention to how things relate to one another and to the patterns of interaction in the system. But being a systemic practitioner is more than just intervening to assist in adjusting patterns of communication that are not working. It means that the practitioners provide opportunities for participants to see their own patterns and invent better ones.

Seeing that human communication is characterized by patterns of interaction is helpful. Consistent with this thinking, the systems view shows that interaction creates something more than an accumulation of individual effort. A *system* is a set of elements that interact with one another to create forces larger than the sum of the parts. If two people work together to push a

boulder off a cliff, the collective forces of the two add up to enough energy to move the object. This is not a system. System interactions, in contrast, lead to something more than a mere accumulation of energy. There is an interaction effect that leads to a synergistic outcome. From a systems perspective, we might find that as each of us exerts force on the boulder, an interaction effect actually creates more overall force than a sum of our individual efforts.

Systemic thinking posits that many forces interact with one another in a complex system of dynamic forces that work more in circles than in straight lines. When we pushed the boulder off the cliff, we observed the effect of linear causation—a force causing movement of an object; but in systems, causation is mutual so that elements impact one another in a network of influences.

The system perspective allows a look beyond the obvious where a number of things are seen happening in conflict situations, such as:

Connections. Once people adopt a systemic view, they begin to see actions affecting other actions and the way in which statements and behaviors are connected, and they become interested in the relationship or what lies between actions. Furthermore, they begin to notice that interactions affect other interactions. In a family, for example, a conflict between mother and father impacts the interactions between parents and children and between siblings. Further, those other interactions feed back to influence what mother and father are doing together. Moreover, the children's interactions in school and in the community are affected by the dynamics at home.

Connections can be described as *correlations*, in which things vary together. For example, when mother gets mad, father also gets mad. The angrier one gets, the angrier the other becomes. From a systems point of view, a practitioner would be interested in the mutual spiral in which anger breeds more anger. As another example, a practitioner might notice that the more father nags, the more mother withdraws. Father says that when mother becomes more distant, he

must become more insistent. Mother says that when father becomes more demanding, she must be more protective. They have different explanations, but the pattern is clear.

System environments. Systems are never isolated but always connect to other systems, just like the family and school in the above example. Where does one system end and the other begin? The answer depends upon where you want to draw the line. System *boundaries* are arbitrary. When you take a systems view, you make a decision what system to look at, while also recognizing that other systems constitute the environment. This is important, because systems both influence and are influenced by their environments. The family affects the school, but the school affects the family. There are similar interactions between a family and its extended family, the workplace, church, neighborhood, and community.

As an example, during a mediation session between co-workers, mediators concentrate mostly on the interaction between the two parties involved. A systems view, however, leads mediators to understand that their conflict is not isolated from the larger workplace in which it occurred. Other things happening there affect it, and the conflict certainly has an impact on this environment as well. One of the goals of this kind of mediation is to help the disputants see this larger picture and to make these important connections. This same kind of analysis may be carried into every conflict situation. The war in Iraq took place in a geo-political system, including many political, economic, and social forces both within the United States and Iraq and beyond their borders as well.

Self-organization. Conflicts seem to have a life of their own. Like any system, a conflict is *cybernetic*, meaning that it exerts energy to organize itself. This is why conflicts are often self-perpetuating. The participants seem powerless to change the state of affairs in which they are engaged. A systems perspective helps practitioners see how the interaction patterns in the

system work to maintain some balance. Expectations that arise in conflicts are strongly cybernetic. If I expect you to be mad at me, I will probably act in ways that perpetuate your anger. If you perceive that I withdraw into inaction, you become even more persistent in trying to make me assume responsibility, which keeps the pattern going.

Sometimes conflict patterns are so strong that they can be changed only by introducing a new set of forces into the system. In a family, for example, patterns may change with the birth of a child, the death of a parent, the departure of a teenager for college or service, a divorce. Managers in organizations sometimes find it necessary to re-assign certain employees in order to break a pattern that poisons the workplace. Elections may serve the same function in political systems, as do victory and defeat in war.

How else do these systemic principles translate into practice? Following are some guidelines developed in the 1990s that can be used in conflict-intervention work:

1. *Work with patterns of interaction.* Don't be too concerned about what any one person says or does, who is right and who is wrong, or what the "facts" truly are. Instead, look at how people respond to one another, how they behave toward one another, what they say to one another, and how their stories relate to one another.
2. *Work collaboratively.* Invite participants to work with you in designing the intervention. Avoid the tendency of telling the group what they should do. Try to work with the group as much as you can. Keep checking to make sure that what is being done seems to be on the right track, and adjust if you need to.
3. *Work creatively.* Avoid cookie-cutter models, trainings, and interventions. Avoid the tendency to "hit and run" by presenting a package deal and then going to the airport. Be creative in thinking of interesting new ways to work.

4. *Work toward constructive futures.* Keep asking participants to think ahead, to move forward, to look at “ends in view,” and think about the system they would like to make.
5. *Never plan too far in advance.* Like any good conversation, take it a turn at a time. Listen, respond, and listen again. See where the path takes you.
6. *Work with the system as it is, not where you think it should be.* Later, we’ll talk about learning the “grammar” of the system, which means the categories they use, how they talk, and what they think they are doing. Enter this grammar and then challenge it.
7. *Shift your goals as needed.* What you think you are doing in an intervention may not be what you end up doing. See what is going on and set your goals as you work

Transforming conflict. In the 1990s, the academics and the practitioners began to say aloud that which had only been discussed quietly before. Instead of trying to resolve the conflict, we can communicate in ways that transform it. Negotiation had emerged as a more organized and hopeful way to communicate in the midst of human differences, but there still existed violence, domination, and communication that amassed power in whatever form to win.

These processes of domination and negotiation typically aim for *first-order change*. Participants in a process to address their conflict come to change their resources and practices—how they think and what they do. Processes of transformation, in contrast, create conditions for *second-order change*, or a shift in how to define the relationships among the parties or the system in which the conflict is occurring. Participants may not change their opinions on the issues they face, but they do change how they view themselves, others, and the community. Transformative processes make it possible for groups and individuals to accept the values of diversity, acknowledge the legitimacy of positions other than their own, respect people who hold

very different ideas, and continue a constructive conversation that permits multiplicity and even harvests the benefits of diversity (Littlejohn, 2004).

Interest-based problem solving can be transformative, as it enables parties to redefine their challenge from a conflict to resolve competitively to a problem to solve collaboratively. This is especially the case when the parties undertake negotiation with the full intention of building a relationship of respect. However, negotiation in any form cannot overcome the most serious intractable moral conflicts. Instead, new processes of dialogue may be necessary to transform the relationship so that negotiations might proceed in the future.

Transformative processes have several characteristics. First, they create categories that transcend differences among parties by encouraging participants to find joining places, shared concerns, and mutual goals. Second, they shift discussion from persuasion, influence, and bargaining to listening, understanding, and respect. Third, they create a forum in which participants can learn significant new things about themselves and other people and develop fresh ways of understanding the situation. Fourth, it encourages participants to learn how each participant is a complex, fully formed individual with a history, values, and good intentions. Fifth, transformative processes allow difference to stand without resolution. Intelligent, well meaning people can and should disagree, and that's okay. Finally, transformative processes set the stage for collaborative work in the future.

Social construction. During the 1990s the folks who studied and practiced in the field of communication and conflict had many opportunities to be introduced to social construction, both as a theory and as a guide for practice. Ken Gergen's contributions in the 1990s were numerous, and he was seen as an important guide in postmodern times. His book *The Saturated Self* (Gergen, 1991) explored the dissolution of the self in postmodern times, and in "Refiguring Self

and Psychology” (1993), Gergen challenged the assumptions of contemporary theory and illuminated generative theory. To close out the decade, Gergen invited social theorists and practitioners to social construction by reviewing its impact over the past decade and commenting on its potential for the present in his book *An Invitation to Social Construction* (Gergen, 1999). In addition, Sheila McNamee teamed with Gergen to bring forth *Relational Responsibility: Resources for Sustainable Dialogue* (McNamee & Gergen, 1999), which challenged social communicators to reconsider individual responsibility as communicators through the concept of relational responsibility. Here, dialogue between people builds meaning rather than individual intentions. Relational responsibility refers to attentiveness to the relating process.

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) continued to gain worldwide notice as both a theory that supported social construction and a commitment to practice that supported the creation of better social worlds. David Cooperrider and his colleagues continued to be active through the 1990s, producing a variety of articles and books on AI (Cooperrider & Whitney, 1999; Cooperrider & Dutton, 1999; Cooperrider & Dutton, 1998; Cooperrider, 1996; Cooperrider, Barrett, & Srivastva, 1995.) This work continued to ask what gives life to systems and how those resources could be used to mobilize constructive change for people, their organizations, and larger systems.

As mentioned earlier, contributions by Barnett Pearce and Stephen Littlejohn provided a strong link between communication and conflict and social construction. Recognizing that the focus on conflict, in both theory and practice, was changing rapidly and getting more sophisticated, they looked at how human differences could stem from incommensurate moral worldviews or differing social realities. Human beings and their language patterns (which are socially constructed) could be transformed to create better social discourse. Pearce and Littlejohn (1997) introduced “transcendent discourse,” which invited communicators to explore

the tension between silencing and expressing moral discourse and choose patterns that transcend those that end in frustration, argument, and even violence.

Galanes and Leeds-Hurwitz (2009) edited a volume that also tied together the worlds of communication and conflict with social construction. The idea for *Socially Constructing Communication* originated at National Communication Association's Summer Institute "Catching Ourselves in the Act: A Collaborative Planning Session to Enrich our Discipline through Social Constructionist Approaches." In *Social Approaches to Communication*, the collected writers looked at interpersonal communication and questioned why it had been identified for so long with quantitative, scientific, and experimental approaches. This exploration of the power of qualitative and interpretive methods set the stage for social construction contributions. In particular, several articles in this volume challenged the core of communication study by firmly planting social construction in the field.

Pearce used the metaphor of a sailor's record of the journey for his chapter that gives an array of social construction voices on their own journey (1995). He looked at the differences among those voices, and proclaimed that they are a persistent (maybe not dominant) chorus in social science. Seeing the differences as significant, Pearce did not intend to eradicate them but to "facilitate the wholesome conversation among us that will refresh and illuminate us" (Pearce, 1995, p. 108).

Chen and Pearce (1995) began an important and enduring conversation in their chapter. They examined the case study method in research and concluded case studies are a useful and necessary approach to research. From a social construction perspective, case studies should be evaluated by different criteria. "[T]he criterion by which a case study is evaluated is its ability to explicate the richness and particularity of what it describes" (Chen & Pearce, 1995, p. 141). In

traditional case study research, the case is viewed a sample of something else, whereas social constructionists see the case as a particular thing in itself, not to be used for comparing to other situations and making claims. The purpose of case study research is to study *the* case at hand.

Cronen's chapter introduced practical theory as one where the principles that guide the researcher's study evolve, and that evolution impacts the triad: the phenomena under study, the persons involved with the phenomena, and the researcher's own practices and abilities (Cronen, 1995). Cronen (1995, p. 231) defined five features for this emerging guide for researchers and theorists as:

1. concerned with everyday life practice;
2. providing an evolving grammar, or way of talking about, communicative practices;
3. generating a family of methods for the study of situated social action;
4. co-evolving both the abilities of its practitioners and the consequences of its use; and
5. assessing by its consequences—specifically in terms of how it makes life better.

Cronen saw that social construction researchers have a task ahead: Researchers could embrace the evolutions in practical theory as vital (rather than a weakness) to the coevolution of social science research. “[U]se of a practical theory should not only lead to enhanced abilities for whom we study or with whom we consult, but should also enrich us as theorists and practitioners” (Cronen, 1995, p. 237). Thanks to Pearce, Chen, and Cronen, social construction created a place for all involved to become enriched and construct better lives. Such a claim is surely inviting!

Personal reflection. The 1990s was a time when I bloomed into a full-fledged communication consultant. Most of my work was in mediation for individuals and systems of all sizes, but occasionally I was engaged to work in public issue management and training. The

focus of conflict management researchers and practitioners during that time was how to provide more satisfactory processes for people in conflict. My partnership with Stephen Littlejohn during those years enabled us to periodically reflect on our practice and ask: *How can we think and practice more relationally, systemically, and collaboratively to produce better participant satisfaction?*⁵ The following insights emerged from 10 years of addressing that question and captured in our books. In our commitment to reflecting on that question, we realized the significance of mediation and communication sessions where our communication was relationally, collaboratively, appreciatively and systemically engaged.

Thinking relationally about mediation. Traditionally, mediation has been viewed as a process of settling disputes. As a case in point, the District Court in our city has a settlement week in which mediators donate their time “for the public good” to clear as many lawsuits off the calendar as possible and make life easier for everyone associated with the court, not to mention the parties and their attorneys. Compared to the battering that most disputants experience in litigation, settling via mediation can be a very good thing.

It is no wonder, then, that most mediation and mediation training is settlement oriented. Mediation skills are geared toward resolving the conflict, and the effectiveness of mediation is evaluated in terms of the settlement rate. Mediators often feel a certain amount of pride if they settle a case and a certain amount of failure if they do not.

Susan Barnes-Anderson, the director of the local Metropolitan Court Mediation Program, shared that the highest agreement rate in the history of the program—82%—occurred after she had been advising mediators not to push for agreements (Barnes-Anderson 1992). She had in fact observed that mediators were slowing down and providing more time for parties to gather

⁵ I began working with Dr. Stephen Littlejohn in the late 90's. When referring to my work with Stephen Littlejohn, I use “we” and first person stories and examples.

information and think through the situation, and not getting upset if parties did not reach an agreement. And the agreement rate went up!

We do not want to be guilty of faulty causal reasoning here, but this anecdote reminds of a growing suspicion of the strong settlement orientation of traditional mediation. We do not object to a settlement focus in mediations; indeed, it has real virtues. But mediators sometimes become so focused on agreements that they become oblivious to the downside.

If you concentrate solely on pressuring parties to settle, you may miss opportunities to help them work on useful communication skills to manage their own disputes, maintain a working relationship for the future, and evaluate clearly for themselves what the outcome of the mediation should be. Mediator pressure to settle removes responsibility from the parties to make their own decisions about what an appropriate outcome might be.

We once observed a family mediation in which the parents were having trouble with their teenage son. It was a typical adolescent situation, with lots of testing, power struggles, and emotional flare-ups. We have experienced similar conflicts with our own teens, as have most of our friends. In this case, the mediators pushed hard for an agreement. They had the family members make lists of what they wanted. They goaded the son to come up with demands and proposals, even though he could not be clear on what he wanted or could offer. We watched in agony as the mediators squeezed an agreement out of this family. The result was screwy, including provisions such as (1) we will be nice to one another; (2) we will not fight; (3) we will work out our differences. As soon as they got home, the mother proudly attached the agreement to the refrigerator with magnets, but we learned from a follow-up call that it did not last a week! We came to call this “the case in which an agreement was not a solution.”

In some ways, the term *resolution* better fits mediation than does *settlement* or *agreement*, if we define *resolution* broadly. Our friend Jeff Grant reminds us that for some people *resolution* can mean simply being heard, feeling safe or secure, or just getting a good night's sleep. For others it may be a full-blown settlement agreement, and that's okay too. For these reasons, we use the definition of mediation in Domenici & Littlejohn's (2001) book *Mediation:*

Empowerment in Conflict Management: "a process where parties are encouraged to see and make clear, deliberate choices, while acknowledging the perspective of the other. In this process, mutually acceptable agreement is one possible outcome" (p. 28).

The publication of Robert Baruch Bush and Joseph Folger's (1994) *The Promise of Mediation* probably did more than anything else to raise consciousness in the mediation community of the limits of the settlement model of mediation. In this controversial work, they argue that overemphasis on settlement detracts from empowering parties to establish their own process and outcome and to recognize the perspectives, ideas, and interests of other parties. We agree with their conclusion, that mediation should be primarily a relational intervention.

Bush and Folger (1994) called the kind of mediation that concentrates on relationships the *transformative* model and the type that focuses on settlement the *satisfaction* model. For us the terms *relational* and *settlement* work as well. Lately, a new term "settlement facilitation," as opposed to "mediation," is being used increasingly to designate the kind of intervention in which parties are pressured to come to agreement. We like distinction between two forms of third-party intervention, each of which has virtues and drawbacks.

In our mind, it is entirely possible to do good settlement work and also be very relational in approach, but it takes a certain perspective and skill to do this. We are eager to help parties write agreements, if that is the outcome that emerges in their conversation, but our first hope is always

that each party feels the mediation worked for them, they learned significant new things from the conversation, they felt empowered to make clear decisions, and they came to recognize others' perspectives with respect. When that happens, whether an agreement was written or not, we feel very good about the session.

A settlement facilitator would probably make the point that their clients have no ongoing relationship and that there is little if any hope that good communication can ever be achieved between them. Certainly in large-stakes litigation cases, this is probably true. The settlement facilitator would say that it is a waste of time and a diversion to think about building positive relationships. That would be hard to disagree with if we limited our view of relationship to the parties themselves. Taking a broader view, we want to know if the parties might learn that collaboration is possible, that constructive forms of communication can lead to positive outcomes, and that people can think of better ways to settle disputes than through lawsuits. In other words, mediation has implications for society beyond settling the immediate dispute. If the parties learn new ways to relate to others in the process of mediation, then a larger social end is being achieved.

Mediation as collaborative communication. Since the 1970s, conflict management theorists have promoted the values of collaboration as a form of conflict resolution. Collaboration, or the win-win solution, became especially popular among practitioners after the Harvard Negotiation Project got off the ground. We still had our students read Fisher and Ury's (1981) classic *Getting to Yes*, and we used principled negotiation in our practice as well. But this was not where we began or ended our thinking about collaboration.

For us, collaboration is an ideal against which we always measure our work. When conflict-management processes are at their best, parties collaborate from start to finish, and the process as

well as the outcome is constructed jointly. In the deepest sense of the term, this means that parties work together to establish what they want from mediation and how they want to accomplish it. We have done mediations in which the parties just want a chance to tell their stories and have these recognized by the other party. We have also done mediations in which parties are mostly interested in testing the possibility of agreement to help them make a decision about whether to go on to court or not. Often, of course, parties are not sure what they want, or they disagree about what they want to accomplish, and the mediation becomes a process to help them clarify and negotiate the best course of action for both.

It often happens that the parties in mediation want very different things from the process, and we work with the parties to make it possible for them to achieve their respective goals. We try not to pre-judge what those goals might be. One party might want to get a financial settlement, and the other party just wants to have the conflict over so they can move on with their life. As mediators, we will reality test respective goals pretty hard to make sure that each party clearly understands and accepts these possible outcomes, but ultimately it is the parties themselves who must be responsible for deciding what they want. If both parties ultimately work to make it possible for each to achieve his or her goals, they are collaborating toward that end.

As mediators, then, our role is to open a space for the parties to negotiate their own outcomes. This means a great deal more than unlocking the door and putting tablets and pens on the table. We open a space for collaboration from the first contact with the client, and we keep it open in a variety of ways throughout the mediation

A collaborative space includes many things. It is a space in which people can say what needs to be said and hear what needs to be heard. It is a space in which the parties can work out and clarify what they want. It is a space in which disputants are free to change their mind. It is an

experimental space, in which parties can play with ideas and suggest new approaches. It is a creative space, in which ideas can be generated. It is an exploratory space, in which ideas can be tested, elaborated, modified, and extended. It is also a space in which new and different processes and forms of communication can be tried.

For all these reasons, a collaborative space must also be a safe environment. However, what is safe for one person may be threatening to another. So the parties must also collaborate to create the kind of environment in which everyone feels sufficiently safe to proceed constructively. We tell our students that a mediation session is rarely just one mediation. It can involve several mediations going on at once. We might be mediating the rules. We might mediate the process. We might mediate desired outcomes. And, of course, we might mediate an agreement. A “meta” mediation that is always going on involves how to construct a safe environment.

Here are a number of ways to help establish safety.

- Think consciously about time and place.
- Provide a structure that feels safe.
- Solicit agreements on how the discussion should be done.
- Promote good facework.
- Respond to willingness and felt need.
- Find a shared level of comfort.
- Leave an out.
- Maintain impartiality.

We try to keep these points in our mind throughout any mediation.

Introduce the mediation process, relationally and collaboratively. We think that the opening of a mediation session, the way it is presented to the clients, is a vital first step toward beginning the collaboration process. Because we take a relational approach in our mediations, our introductions sound somewhat different from the standard opening taught in basic mediation training. Here are some guidelines we use:

We keep our introductions general and open. Our introductions are not very prescriptive. We keep our introductions quite simple and brief. We usually say that mediation is an informal process for the parties to discuss their “situation.” We don’t call it a *problem*, *dispute*, or *conflict* because we want the parties to define it in their own way. We tell them that mediation is an opportunity to work through the issues that have brought them here. We describe ourselves as impartial facilitators who will help them have a constructive conversation. We try to give them an idea of what to expect. We usually say that we will ask lots of questions, and we encourage them to listen well to one another. Although we are cautious about caucuses, we tell them that private sessions are possible.

We do not over emphasize groundrules in the beginning. Many mediators begin with a list of groundrules, but our preference is to keep the rules somewhat open at the beginning. We normally prefer to see how things go first and let the disputants themselves indicate what they want and need. We might simply ask the disputants to use normal standards of politeness. If we have reason to believe that safety requires strict rules from the beginning, we might suggest a few, though we are more likely to invite the disputants themselves to negotiate their own rules. If things get out of hand later, we can always take a pause to suggest additional rules at that point.

We present agreement only as one possible outcome. We always mention the possibility of agreement, but we never push it. We may show the disputants the agreement form and say that it is there if they choose to use it. We also say that we can help them write up the agreement if they get to that point.

We tell the parties we want the mediation to work for them. We tell disputants that mediation is their process, and they should collaborate to use the time for beneficial outcomes. We never suggest what those outcomes might be.

We are explicit about our desire to help make a safe environment. We tell parties quite clearly that this is our job. We invite them to keep us informed about their comfort level and to work with one another to keep things safe.

We try to establish a relaxed environment. We work nonverbally to give a relaxed feeling. We always try to be friendly, to connect with the parties, and to be responsive and inviting in our demeanor. We greet the parties warmly and thank them for coming. We prefer to set up the chairs around the table in a circular fashion and allow the disputants themselves to determine how they want to orient themselves.

We ask the parties if they have special needs or requests. We ask them quite directly if there is anything they need to make the mediation work well. We ask them if they have any requests about the process itself that would make it easier for them.

We ask the parties to keep us informed about how the process is going throughout the mediation. We tell our disputants that because mediation is a collaborative conversation, they should let us know of things that are making them uncomfortable or making it difficult for them proceed. We encourage the parties to make process suggestions at any time, and we tell them to feel free to request a private meeting with us if they wish.

We ask the parties how they would like to begin. Often the mediator establishes the order of things in advance. Some mediators want to have the disputants take strict turns. Some want to allow the party with least power to begin, a judgment we would rather not make. Some begin with the person who brought the complaint. Our clear preference is for the disputants themselves to decide how to proceed. Sometimes a general discussion begins without a lot of formal turn taking, and that can feel quite comfortable in many cases. Other times, they prefer for one party to begin with a formal statement followed by a statement by the other side. Often the disputants start off somewhat formally and later move to a more informal back-and-forth discussion.

Caucuses

Caucuses, or private meetings with the parties, are common in mediation. Most settlement facilitations are entirely caucus-based. In these cases the mediator typically meets with the parties in a brief joint session at the beginning, separates them, and then conducts a kind of shuttle diplomacy. We know an attorney who recently traveled 500 miles to represent a client in mediation and ended up sitting all day in a small room waiting for the mediator, who finally made a 10-minute appearance. This is probably an exceptional case, but it does illustrate what caucused-based mediation can be like.

Heavy use of caucuses makes sense when the sole goal of mediation is settlement and the primary process is negotiation. But caucused-based mediation has many hazards, especially for a relationally-oriented mediator. Here are just a few:

- Because caucuses are confidential, a disputant may tell you something that is impossible to check with the other party.
- Parties will see caucuses as an opportunity to win you over to their side rather than negotiate in good faith.

- You collude with the parties in keeping secrets, which leads to suspicion and erodes trust.
- The parties do not have a chance to hear, acknowledge, and recognize the perspectives and stories of the other.
- There is no chance for the parties to work on building a relationship or developing new communication patterns with one another.
- Patterns of polarization and separation are reinforced.

For these reasons we prefer to downplay the use of caucuses. We would rather work openly in an environment in which the parties can deal directly with one another. Still, caucuses do have their place, and we use them occasionally. It sometimes happens that one or both parties simply do not feel safe in the presence of the other. They believe they will be intimidated, threatened, or “out powered” in some way. So when a party asks for a private meeting, we honor that. Of course, if we meet with one side privately, we will meet with the other privately as well. Sometimes, too, we may sense that private meetings are necessary to give the parties a chance to explore and express their interests, goals, and ideas more safely without the other party present. If that happens, we will suggest a caucus, but check to make sure that everyone is okay with it. When might we feel that collaboration and safety would be well served by moving to caucus?

- The parties get stuck and are unable to move forward and seem unresponsive to mediator interventions.
- We sense that a party is afraid to talk about something.
- Emotions are so high that the parties need a break from one another.
- A party seems withdrawn, confused, discouraged, or unable to speak clearly or listen well.

- The session has gotten out of control.

Almost never in our practice do we find it necessary to stay in the caucus mode, and we will always return to joint sessions as soon as it feels appropriate to do so.

A special case of the caucus should be mentioned at this point. We sometimes use a pre-mediation caucus with the parties, especially if we learned during the intake process that one or both have special concerns about the process. Here a caucus can actually serve as a tool of collaboration by allowing parties to explore their special needs, suggest groundrules, or alert the mediator to particular things that might make the mediation feel safer to them. We use this technique rarely, but it can be helpful in special cases.

Mediation: hard or soft. We recently ran into a colleague on the street and stopped to talk for a few minutes. We were surprised when he mentioned that he thought our respective styles were different. He characterized his own style as hard and ours as soft. He really did not mean to be judgmental, only to describe a difference.

The hard-soft metaphor is often used to make a distinction among conflict-resolution practitioners. The word *hard* seems to mean formal and results-oriented; and *soft* means informal, subjective, and not particularly concerned about results. We think this is an unfortunate metaphor for a variety of reasons. First, it implies that you have to be one or the other, and we believe that it is entirely possible to work toward settlement and be relationally oriented at the same time. Second, it implies that relational mediation is formless and without a clear procedure, whereas this kind of mediation actually requires a great deal of skill, relies on sophisticated techniques, and often demands adherence to process. Further, the distinction between results-oriented and non-results-oriented mediation seems false to us. Although settlement facilitation (the “hard” side of mediation) measures its effectiveness in terms of clear,

well-articulated agreements, this is only one kind of success. Relational mediation also has outcomes that are often more important than an agreement. Just because you cannot fold those results into an envelope does not mean that they are “soft.” Often these less tangible results are absolutely essential for other “harder” outcomes to occur.

We believe that settlement facilitation is an honorable practice and serves a vital function in society. For us, however, building relationships and providing enduring process tools are even more important, and they are essential in systemic practice.

In mediation trainings, participants may have been taught that an early step in mediation is the “information gathering” stage, the time when the disputants tell their versions of what happened. Here the mediator is supposed to ask questions to clarify the situation and learn the facts. This is seen as a period to learn what facts are agreed upon, which are disputed, what the parties positions might be, and possibly uncover their interests. However, we prefer to cast this stage somewhat differently.

Rather than “information gathering,” we prefer to think of this stage as “story telling.” Although our disputants sometimes produce documents and evidence to try to prove their version of the facts as if they were in a court of law, what we are really working with in any mediation are stories, the participants’ depiction of events. These stories have characters, plots, episodes, dialogue, and all of the elements of a good narrative. We get good “information” from these stories, but from a systemic view, the stories themselves are the raw materials that can be worked. Although it is instructive and convenient to teach mediation as a series of “stages,” every mediator knows that this oversimplifies the process. Indeed, we work with stories from beginning to end. What you really end up with on the table is a pile of stories, and good mediation means knowing how to work creatively with these.

Working with stories. We once mediated a case between a homeless man and a social services agency. As the mediation proceeded, the parties told us story after story from the past. The homeless man told about his illness, discomfort, and inability to get medical attention. The agency representative told about efforts to locate the man, take him to the hospital, and the man's abusive treatment of social workers and medical personnel. This story telling went on for some time, back and forth. New stories were added, and previous stories were elaborated and sometimes changed. Some stories were disputed. Some stories were shared. Some stories had a more or less positive ending, and some were quite sad.

This exchange illustrates the first kind of story that we often encounter in mediations—*stories of the past*. When these stories are told and heard, they give the participants a chance to see history through the eyes of the other. They give parties the opportunity to express and work through what happened and to discover the heart of the matter for each of them. When mediators ask good questions to add detail to the stories, the participants can learn more about what seemed most important, what mattered the most, and how they perceived events.

Another kind of story we hear in mediations is *stories of the present*. Here we get various versions of what is going on in mediation. Why are we here, and what is this all about? How do we want to use this time? What do we hope will happen, and what do we hope will not? In the social service case, the agency repeatedly told of their desire to hear from the man what he wanted and how they could serve him better. They also said how much they wanted him to hear their frustrations in providing him service and the aggravating limitations placed on their agency because of budget declines. The homeless man was less clear on how to use mediation. In this case, we encountered a common problem—one party was able to tell a coherent story of the present, but the other could not.

A third type of story, maybe the most important of all, is the *story of the future*. Here the parties begin to imagine the future. People tell what they want, and they share how they might get there. In the case above, the homeless man was not very good at telling stories of the present, but he was very good at telling stories of the future. He was crystal clear about the kind of relationship he wanted and the kind of services he believed he deserved.

These stories provide information about how the participants define their system, how they view their relationship, the patterns of interaction they have experienced, who else is involved, and what might be done. As mediators, we always listen for story connections—what characters are in common, what plot lines are shared, how one story extends another. We look for how stories of the past, present, and future connect with one another. We point these connections out and ask questions about them. We look for positive resources in the stories that can be used as building blocks for collaboration.

The social worker in the above mediation told a passionate story of how he used to drive around and look for his homeless client on the street, check on him, take him to the doctor, and follow up by seeing how well he was doing. He continued this story by expressing his sadness at not being able to do that any more. The villain in this story was the state, which had recently cut the funds necessary to provide this kind of case-management work. The homeless man told the story of feeling abandoned and losing services that were his legal right. His villain was the social worker, who never showed up any more. These two stories connected in some very interesting ways. Each had the same characters and events, but the motives and villains were different. Each was a story of the past that contained seeds for stories of the future. The challenge in connecting these stories, it seemed to us, was to find in the social worker's concern and past behavior a way to build a future story that fulfilled the other man's vision.

Stories, then, are the material we work with in mediations. We ask questions about them, we connect them, and we reframe them. When these stories are explored, certain meta-stories begin to emerge, and these larger stories tell us how the participants define and characterize their system. These meta-stories are extremely important because they suggest points at which we as mediators might enter the conversation and how. Initially in most mediations, meta-stories tend to be negative, but every negative story has a positive counterpart. The negative meta-stories show us where to enter the system, and the positive ones provide clues as to where the system might move. Next are some common meta-stories of mediation.

The negative story of confusion and the positive story of empowerment. It often happens in mediation that the first rounds of stories are somewhat confused and contradictory. Sometimes disputants are not clear about what story they want to tell or how to tell it. They really don't have a clear grasp of what they want or how to say what they want. They may tell short, cryptic stories that don't make sense, or they may tell long rambling ones with no clear point. In mediation people can think the story through more carefully, try different versions, decide what elements really matter, and in the end make a coherent statement that represents their sense of past, present, and future. When this happens, the negative story of confusion is transformed into a positive story of empowerment.

The negative story of disrespect and the positive story of recognition. There is a common pattern seen in mediations. One side tells his story. The other side tells hers. The first side angrily repeats his story, and the second then repeats her version. This process goes back and forth. Eventually, the mediation will stall, the participants will get frustrated, and the hope of positive results will fade. At some point, however, a new pattern can emerge, and this is a pattern of acknowledgment, the realization and reflection from the parties that the other person's

story has integrity. They may not share the story, but they begin to see how and why the other person holds to it. In its highest form, the parties hear one another's stories well and acknowledge one another's good reasons for believing as they do. Here a negative story of disrespect is transformed into a positive story of recognition.

The negative story of blame and the positive story of respect. Perhaps the most common pattern we see in the first stages of mediation is blaming. Disputants say in some many different ways, "If it weren't for you . . ." And sometimes that pattern remains throughout the mediation. We sometimes even get to the point of signing agreements, and the blame still remains. More often, however, this pattern changes during the course of the mediation. If the parties are willing to listen to one another and collaborate in achieving a positive outcome, positive regard begins to grow. You don't have to agree with someone to respect them. Respect happens when we understand and acknowledge another person's perspective and come to realize that their position is reasonable within their experience. We are always gratified to see a story of blame be transformed into one of respect.

The negative story of competition and the positive story of cooperation. Another extremely common pattern in mediation is the competitive stance. We have an acquaintance whose neighbor filed a complaint against him for his barking dog. This case was referred to mediation, and the parties agreed to go. Knowing of our background in mediation, our friend came to us to get some tips on "how to win." We still laugh about that today, and in retrospect he now laughs with us. Many people enter mediation because they believe it will give them a forum in which to make compelling arguments to win the other side over to their point of view. They think that if they can state their case clearly, the other side will see the errors of their ways. Disputants are actually surprised when this doesn't happen. No matter how well they state their case, the other

side doesn't see it. Not only that, but the other side has the gall to try to persuade them too! After a few rounds of "persuasive" speeches, the disputants come to the realization that this pattern is not going to work. Some just give up and leave at that point, but we can usually get them to stay long enough to see other possibilities. When disputants shift from trying to win to trying to work out a solution, when they start negotiating in good faith, we see the transformation from competition to cooperation.

The negative story of "being stuck" and the positive story of "moving forward." Even after those with whom we work develop a degree of respect and cooperation, they often find themselves in a repetitive pattern they don't know how to transcend. They get stuck. Because their individual interests are still important, they cannot figure out a way to get beyond restating what they want. They may wish to change this pattern, but they don't know how. On several occasions, we have heard disputants actually say, "I really want to get this over with. Can't we just do something?" We like to hear this statement in mediation because it signals to us that the parties are ready to change the pattern in some substantial way. They want to transform the story of being stuck to a story of moving forward.

The negative story of disorganization and the positive story of order. Effective conflict-intervention professionals are not afraid of complexity. By itself, complexity may be a positive story rather than a negative one. It becomes negative when the parties are confused because they are not able to impart any kind of organization or analysis on the complexity. Mediators can really help with this kind of problem, and there are a host of traditional mediation techniques that can help the parties transform their stories of disorganization to stories of order.

The negative story of indecision and the positive story of commitment. One of the most interesting and frustrating moments in a mediation occur when the issues are defined and the

options are laid out, and the parties just cannot agree. They cannot commit or decide. Too many mediations fall apart at this point. One of the biggest challenges of collaboration involves transforming the story of indecision to one of commitment.

The negative story of rage and the positive story of passion. Mediations vary in the level of emotion displayed. Some cases are rather placid, and others are quite volatile. Dealing with emotion is often an important consideration. We like to think of emotions as story elements. They are both part of the story and part of the style of telling. For us, emotions are not just emotions, but they must be looked at in terms of how they fit into the narrative of the mediation.

The conventional wisdom of mediation says that disputants simply need to get their emotions out, and mediators are advised to allow a period of venting so that the parties can settle down and get rational. This sometimes works, but the metaphor of “venting” can be problematic. It imagines that feelings are all bottled up and need to be released to lower the pressure. Often, however, “venting” does not calm the parties down. Sometimes it just works them up. Rather than venting, expressing strong emotion is more like stoking. We also believe that vociferous expression of feeling by one party is sometimes very threatening and unsafe to the other. In these cases it is more like aggression than venting. So when emotions are running high, we must make a judgment about what to do. We might feel that venting should be tried, or we might feel that something else would be better.

Emotion is both common and expected in serious conflict situations. The expression of emotion per se should never be taken as a negative. The question is how emotion is expressed, what it represents, and what it makes between the parties. We have seen many cases in which strong emotion is the force that leads to collaboration in the end. We have also seen many cases in which strong emotion erects a barrier that is never overcome. If handled inappropriately,

strong emotion can become rage. If handled well, it becomes a passion that says, “I care enough to be here and work this through.”

Building empowerment and recognition. As previously mentioned, *empowerment* and *recognition* were made popular as twin concepts by Bush and Folger (1994) in *The Promise of Mediation*. These are two fundamental goals of mediation in the relational tradition—to empower parties to understand and express clearly what they want and need and to acknowledge the positions, interests, and values of others.

One of the most poignant cases we have ever mediated involved two women who had been close friends. One owned a business, and the other had been her employee. But things went bad. The owner found herself in the position of having to fire the employee, and the employee filed a discrimination case and sued the owner for damages. Still, despite the harsh feelings that resulted, the two were willing to try mediation. The initial stories went something like this:

The owner told us that her former employee’s performance had declined and that she was unwilling to do assigned tasks. The employee had completely dropped the ball in following up with a client, causing the company to lose the account. She said that the supervisor had talked with the employee, but could not seem to get her to change her behavior. She said that she did not want to fire the employee but felt that she had no choice.

The employee said that she had had problems with the client that got so bad that she was unwilling to work with this person any more. She sought support from her supervisor, who was unwilling to provide it. She said that in every other way, she had been a responsible employee and was shocked that she got fired.

As is almost always the case, the initial stories in this case were somewhat vague and undeveloped. We sensed that each of these women had important things that needed to be said

and heard, and we began to probe gently. We asked the former employee to tell us more about the situation with the client. She slowly began to open up and told about severe sexual harassment experienced in this workplace. She was so uncomfortable working with this client that she just could not continue to do so. She also told us that she had been embarrassed by this situation and had been unable to talk about it. She said that she did not want to bring up this ugly thing and rock the boat at work, so she presented the problem in somewhat general terms to her supervisor. The supervisor just kept pressuring her to go back to the client and “work things out.”

The owner listened to this story. She expressed surprise, saying that she did not know about the harassment. She asked her former friend why she had not told her about it and said that she would certainly have protected her from it if she had only known. She learned that the employee wanted this job very much, needed the income, and did not know how to be specific about what was going on without hurting her employment situation.

During the course of the mediation, the parties learned many new things from one another, not least of which was how much they had valued the friendship they once had. At one point one of them took a fancy pen out of a shopping bag and put it on the table. Both parties teared-up when this gift that the owner had once given her friend was revealed. After some emotional exchanges, the parties began to get to work and talk about the specifics of an agreement, and the mediation ended successfully.

This case was especially satisfying to us because the parties displayed both empowerment and recognition. They were able to tell their stories clearly and well. They came to a point where they were able to talk about what was important to them and to recognize the feelings and

concerns of the other. The mediation provided a place where they could do this in a way that had not been possible before.

Helping people talk so others listen. One of the problems with the settlement model of mediation is that parties are not always given an opportunity to “tell their story.” Sometimes, in fact, this is even discouraged because it distracts them from concentrating on the provisions of an agreement. Our colleague Mark Bennett here in New Mexico tells of a lawsuit resulting from the death of a young man in a ski accident. In mediation, the parties—attorneys for the ski company and the parents of the victim—became stalemated on the amount of the settlement. At this point the mediator decided to get the parents directly involved and asked them to talk candidly, not about the money, but about what this case meant to them. They told about their son and how no amount of money could bring him back. They revealed that money was not the real issue here. As they talked, the representatives of the ski company could hear that the parents just wanted the life of their child and his tragic death acknowledged and to work on some kind of outcome that would honor their son. After this, the mediation took an entirely different turn, and the parties collaborated on setting up a fund for ski safety in the name of their son.

Mediators use several techniques to empower people to talk openly and clearly about their concerns and hopes. In general, these boil down to three things:

- Invite the parties to talk.
- Show that you are taking them seriously.
- Acknowledge their perspective.

We realize that these three principles may seem simple, even simplistic, but they are not always easy to achieve and require some experience to do well.

How do you invite parties to talk? This certainly includes providing the time and space to do so. If you immediately separate your parties, there is no invitation to talk in a way that the other side will hear anything. But time and space are not enough. You have to make the environment feel safe enough for people to open up.

In addition to making things feel safe, we also want to show that we are serious about having the parties talk about what is important to them. Bush and Folger (1994) made a distinction between *macro focusing* and *micro focusing*. When a mediator macro focuses, he or she is concentrating on the “big picture,” or the mediator’s overall plan. When *micro focusing*, the mediator is concentrating just on where the parties themselves are going with their statements. Although we try to keep an eye on the big picture, Bush and Folger have convinced us that the most important topic of the moment is what the speaker is saying, and that’s where our concentration should be. We think that macro focusing discourages the disputants from telling their stories, and micro focusing encourages them to do so.

We once co-mediated a landlord-tenant case with an apprentice mediator. It was tough case. The “landlord” was an apartment manager who was working at the behest of the owner who put him under a lot of pressure to collect rents and evict anyone who had a history of late or non-payments. The manager did not particularly like this role, but his job required it. The tenant had gotten behind in rent payments. We listened as she told her story. Her “old man” was in prison and she had become solely responsible for supporting her three children on pieced-together part-time jobs. She was desperate and wept as she told us that she did not know where her family’s next meal would come from, and now on top of everything else, she was facing eviction. At this moment, we glanced over at the apprentice, who was doing some figuring on a calculator. She looked up and announced: “I see that you two are only \$123 apart.” That response—a gross

example of macro focusing—did not do much to invite the parties to tell what was important to them.

This comment showed that the mediator was either not listening or did not care about what the tenant was saying. We think it is important for mediators to show that they are taking people's statements seriously. This does not mean that we show sympathy or agreement, only that we want to hear it and that we treat the statement with respect. And we show the same respect to all of the parties. Many basic mediation techniques help here. Repeating content, reflecting feelings, and summarizing show that you are listening and taking comments seriously. One of the keys to empowerment, then, is feeling heard.

These techniques are all forms of acknowledgment. When we acknowledge, we say verbally and nonverbally *that* we heard and *what* we heard. In ordinary communication, people have a hard time separating acknowledgment from support or agreement. We normally acknowledge others by showing sympathy toward their points of view. This gets hard in conflict situations when the natural “come-back” is to argue or disagree. In mediation, however, we can model a third form, and that is acknowledgment without either agreeing or disagreeing.

In most basic mediation trainings, the topic of power balancing is covered. The idea here is that the mediator has some responsibility for balancing the power. At first glance, this would appear to be an important step in helping parties with less power express what they want and need. Yet we are uncomfortable with the concept of power balancing, and we do not think of our work in these terms. The problem is that the mediator, who is really an outsider, cannot know what sources of power a party might have available to them. It might look as though a man is out powering a woman by dominating the conversation, but the woman may have a great deal of power in her silence. It may look as though a well-to-do businessperson has more power than a

blue-collar customer, but the customer may have connections and buying power that gives him or her a great deal of power. It may look as though a parent has more power than a teen, but anyone who has raised teenagers might disagree.

Though the term is overused, we still prefer *empowerment* to describe what we do when we help people talk so others will listen. Rather than judge who has the power, we want to empower each party to do and say what needs to be done and said, to identify the problem in their own terms, to establish what a successful outcome would mean for them, and to create ideas for achieving that outcome.

Helping people listen so others talk. One of the problems with the notion of power balancing is that it puts too much responsibility on the mediator. In fact, the parties themselves bear much responsibility for empowering one another. Saying clearly what you want and need is only one side of the equation. The other half involves hearing well what others have to say. One of the greatest moments in mediation occurs when the parties start talking constructively with one another and ignoring the mediator. Sometimes the best intervention is no intervention. You can unwittingly dampen constructive conversation by enforcing a rigid pattern of sequential speechmaking in which each party takes turns talking at the mediator.

Good dialogue consists of living in the tension between standing your ground and being profoundly open to the other. A good mediation conversation is like this. Both sides talk openly about their needs, both listen and acknowledge one another's needs, and they together move to a new place where cooperative action can start. In this process we see the two-dimensional process of empowerment and recognition. In our practice, we rely on four principles for building recognition:

1. Model good listening and recognition.

2. Help the parties micro focus.
3. Acknowledge recognition when you see it.
4. Frame statements so they can be taken seriously.

When we are listening intently, restating, reflecting, and summarizing, we not only signal to the speaker that we are interested in what he or she has to say, but we are showing the other party what this kind of listening and recognition is like. Sometimes parties are ready to “see” this modeling, and sometimes they are not. One of the values of mediation is that the presence of a third-party, especially in a listening role, can bring a degree of civility to the conversation.

When clients smile and express genuine appreciation at the end of a session, we like to think there is a sub-text that reads something like, “Thanks for showing us how to get through this.” If mediators micro and macro focus, so do disputants. The macro focusing of the disputants takes a somewhat different form however. For them the “big picture” is their individual goals and a plan for how to prevail. One reason it is hard for disputants to listen to one another is that their attention is focused on how to get what they want, and they are thinking about the best argument, response, or answer. When mediators repeat, reflect, and summarize, they not only help the speaker clarify his or her own needs, but they help the other party focus on what the speaker thinks is important.

There’s a lot going on in a mediation. It can even be difficult at times for the mediator to get everything, let alone the disputants who have their own emotional agendas. Sometimes a mediation seems like listening to a radio that is set between stations—a lot of static and two or three signals buzzing together. The mediator can turn the dial slightly to bring in one station at a time. Taking time to work through one person’s points, helping to organize these, repeating what seems to be most important, and reflecting feelings helps everybody tune in.

Of course many disputants can and do recognize the interests of the other party. They usually don't stand on the chair and wave a checkered flag, but they will, often subtly, show that they recognize the difficulties, concerns, ideas, and values of the other person. A good mediator will watch very carefully for these signs of recognition and acknowledge them. Because they sometimes go by so quickly, signs of recognition can be missed.

A standard tool of mediators is to help parties frame what has been said in ways that might lead to recognition of one another's contributions. As mediators, we frequently re-frame statements, and there are numerous ways in which to do so:

We can reframe from negative to positive: *You have said that the dog barking keeps you awake. I see that you would like more peace and quiet in the neighborhood.*

We can reframe from past to future: *You are angry that he did not show up for your meeting last week. As I understand it then, things will move more smoothly if he attends future meetings.*

We can reframe from hostile to neutral or positive: *You feel that you were not told the truth and you would like to work in an environment in which honesty is valued.*

We can reframe from individual interests to community interests: *You have asked for a door to be put on your office. You seem to feel that the group could work more efficiently if everyone had a bit more privacy.*

We can reframe from complaint to vision: *You said that Tommy hasn't been home for dinner in two weeks. You would really like to have more time for the family to be together, wouldn't you?*

We can reframe from criticism to request: *You said that Maude was pretty vague in her evaluation of your work. It sounds like you want her to be more specific in the future.*

In each case, reframing makes tough statements easier to hear and the perspectives of other easier to recognize. It can also help to move the conversation from one that is spiraling downward to one that begins to cycle up.

Building community consciousness. The United States is mostly an individualistic society. Empowerment and recognition in private disputes reinforce this pattern because they focus on individuals' respective interests. Sometimes you can have a very successful mediation within the strict confines of individual interests. Indeed, principled negotiation is designed to do exactly this: Come up with a solution that meets everyone's individual interests.

For a variety of reasons, however, strict adherence to individual empowerment, recognition, and negotiation belies the full potential of mediation. For one thing, not all disputes can be cast accurately as a clash of individual interests. Often community interests are at stake. Sometimes the interests of third parties are at stake. Further, many cultures, even within this country, are more collectivist than individual in orientation.

For us, though, the most compelling reason to try to move beyond individual interests is that, although the parties do not always realize it, every dispute is part of a larger system of people, actions, settings, and influences. Further, the participants through their interaction construct the system itself. If they think about the problem in system terms, they can begin to see ways to re-construct or re-direct the system. This is why as mediators we often feel the need to help parties think in a larger, more inclusive frame, a process we call *building community consciousness*.

We use the term *community* here to mean some kind of collective group. It might be a region, town, neighborhood, organization, work team, family, or maybe just the two disputants together. Divorce mediation is a perfect example of the need to move from an individualistic to a system context. Any divorce can be seen as a clash of individual interests. The couple is

fighting over who gets what property. They struggle with who gets child custody and visitation. They struggle over who should pay alimony and child support and how much. Although a divorce mediation can be conducted as individual negotiation, a moment's reflection leads to the inescapable conclusion that the husband and wife are part of an ongoing system that has a history and a future.

Our friend Anne Kass, a family court judge, sees many divorcing couples in and out of court. She reports that they tend to think divorce is a way of being able to escape having to deal with "the jerk," but that couldn't be farther from the truth. In the vast majority of cases, the ex-spouses will be part of each other's lives for a long time. Anne suggests that divorcing couples redefine their relationship and treat it as a business, a very strong business that will work well into the future. When they do this, they have successfully built a community consciousness. She sees this as transforming a relationship rather than throwing it away.

When we work with disputants to develop community consciousness, we try to do three things. First, we attempt to raise awareness of the connections parties have with one another and other parties. Here we are interested in helping them see that their decisions are affected by and affect the interactions and lives of others. Second, we want them to think about how they can participate in reconstructing or redirecting the system so that it works better. Finally, we want the parties to look for the resources in the larger system that can help them move in a more positive direction. In essence, then, we are asking participants to think about how they impact the community and how the community can impact them.

Raising awareness of connections. It would be totally inappropriate for mediators to tell disputants how they are connected to some larger system. We cannot know, and any attempt to do so would be our story, not theirs. At the same time, we can ask questions to help them

identify their own connections. Any system can be defined in numerous ways, and the parties should decide what system is most important to the events affecting their current situation.

When they do this, they begin to broaden their stories to include other characters, larger events, and longer plot lines. They come share their stories of a community.

When it seems right to move to the community level, we will begin asking *systemic questions*. Systemic questions are designed to help participants talk about relationships. They are a way of helping the group shift from an individualistic context to a more collective, systemic one. These questions ask group members to think about and reflect on connections and make comparisons. Systemic questions can help build a sense that one is part of a larger system and is constructing a social reality through its interaction. Systemic questions call attention to the ways in which actions elicit other actions and how statements and behaviors are connected to other statements and behaviors. Such questions helps participants see how their thoughts, actions, and statements are not isolated, but connected to what others think, do, and say.

These questions also tune people into the time dimension. They focus attention on the flow of events from one thing to another and the connection of events over time. We might ask, “How was it different then?” or, “What changed when Betty was moved out of the work group?” In this process, people will begin to talk about how things have changed, and they can begin to imagine patterns of change that might happen in the future.

Systemic questions can accomplish several things:

- They can ask people to characterize how other people behaved or reacted to an event:
How does your son react when your wife takes a long phone call?
- They can ask participants how they reacted to the actions of others: *After your neighbor came over to talk to you about the fence, what did you do next?*

- They can ask people to compare the behavior of one person with that of others: *You said that the staff gets agitated when the boss does not get home from a business trip on time. Who gets most agitated?*
- They can ask for reflections on past change in the system: *How are things different since Sally got promoted?*
- They can ask for ideas about how the system might change in the future: *You said you wished the team acted like a well-oiled machine. What would need to change for them to act like a well-oiled machine?*
- They can ask how one event leads to or connects to another: *You have said that paychecks are often late. What are things like around the office when the paychecks to not arrive on time?*

Because they ask people to think differently about their disputes, systemic questions often sound odd and can be disruptive if they are not well phrased or if they are mistimed. These questions need to be asked “in the grammar of the participants.” In other words, use their words and language as much as possible. Make these questions fit into the context of what is being discussed. When asking systemic questions, use the answers as a basis for new questions so that the respondent can think more deeply about community connections.

We can construct community through Appreciative Inquiry. Once people become aware of the community connections and start to think systemically, it is a very easy for them to explore creative ideas for making a better system. This move in mediation has some distinct advantages. It creates the feeling that participants can make things better for themselves. They come to realize that a better community can only be made cooperatively. They look for positive resources in the system to help them re-design it, and they imagine possible futures. Participants

can get unstuck and think of new patterns of interaction that can move them forward in a positive direction.

When we work to help disputants move forward in this way, we usually mix systemic questions with appreciative ones. Appreciative questions have several qualities:

These questions ask participants to tell about positive experiences.

They help parties explore the positive shadow behind concerns and complaints.

They ask about the positive energy driving a negative situation.

They encourage parties to imagine positive futures.

Like systemic questions, appreciative questions should be asked in a conversational and natural way, in a language with which the parties can identify. As much as possible, they should adapt to what the parties are talking about in the moment. They can also be used during a pause to redirect the discussion.

We are always looking for openings for good appreciative questions. For example, if a disputant is complaining about a problem, we might ask them to tell us what they would prefer. Let's say that one of the parties in a workplace dispute is complaining that the other person is constantly eating in the office. We could ask them to tell us why that bothers them, but in an appreciative frame, we would prefer to ask, "What office behaviors do you think contribute most to a comfortable environment for everyone?"

If one of the parties is telling about a problem or complaint, we might ask them for a positive example to help set the stage: "You said that your office is always frantic and behind schedule. Have you ever worked in a really good environment? How was that different?" We also look for opportunities for the parties to be prospective: "What would need to change for your office to feel less frenetic?"

When things seem to be stuck in a mediation, we often ask the following question: “If this mediation works really well for you—let’s say you are driving home and feel really good about what just happened—what would need to happen here today to make you feel that way?”

Systemic and appreciative questions can be combined in interesting ways to help participants see possibilities and positive connections in the system. For example, if someone is complaining about a problem, we might ask, “Who is doing the most to help and how are they helping?” Or, “If you were to put together a group to help solve this problem, who would be involved and why?” If a disputant comes up with an idea for change, we might ask, “What would be the first step you would take and who would you talk to first about it?” We might even ask, “If your idea were adopted, who would appreciate it the most, and how would they show their appreciation.”

You can see that we are painting a picture of an ideal mediation. The parties started without being able to articulate their needs or hear the interests of the other side. They got to the point in which each was empowered to define his or her needs and goals and to understand and respect those of the other. They then began to realize how the situation has been created by their interactions with one another and other parties. They are starting to think more broadly about the system, how things are connected, and how it might be improved, and they are ready to begin making some decisions about the future. At this point another cluster of goals comes into play—building commitment.

Building commitment. If sufficient groundwork has been laid with empowerment and recognition and community consciousness, eliciting commitment will probably be fairly easy. In some cases, the groundwork is already laid—there is understanding, respect, and a desire to collaborate. When this happens, the parties are ready to get to work drafting a set of action

plans. In a circular fashion, too, mutual commitments further build empowerment/recognition and community consciousness.

For the most part, building commitment is a process of helping the parties define their issues, see their options, and have a critical discussion of the pros and cons of possible actions. This is really a decision-making process that involves three sub-goals—issue framing, exploring the options, and making decisions.

Issue framing. Issue framing is a process of identifying the questions that the disputants need to work out, listing these, prioritizing them, and generating solution options. With a simple mediation, there may be only one issue—how to divide an inheritance, let's say. In more complex mediations, there may be several. For example, in a workplace mediation, the parties may need to talk about workload distribution, use of space, schedules, and office layout. Once everyone is in agreement about their issues, they should decide what order they wish to use. There are several criteria for *agenda setting* covered in any basic training, and we will not list them here. The most important thing is that the parties themselves collaborate in setting their own issue agenda.

The parties then take an issue and brainstorm various options. These are pared down and clustered into a small number of approaches. For example, let's say that a divorcing couple must decide what to do with their home. Perhaps they have three approaches—sell the house and divide the proceeds, have the wife and children live in the house, and rent the house and delay a decision what to do with it.

To get to a realistic set of options, it is often helpful to make quick judgments about several ideas that have been listed. We like to use a system called YNI, which stands for “yes,” “no,” and “interesting.” We once did a multi-party workplace mediation for a large federal agency.

After the group agreed upon their issues, they brainstormed possible solutions. We listed these down the left side of a flip chart page. We then went down the list again and had the parties make judgments about each idea—*yes, we like it*; *no, we do not*; and *this is interesting*. We then threw out the no's and went more carefully down the *interesting* list. That discussion led to some very fruitful discussion of why some ideas were interesting, which helped the group clarify their values. Often at this point a final set of solutions emerge from the discussion and an agreement can be written. Often, however, there are still different opinions of confusion about the best course of action. When this is the case, we encourage a more careful deliberation about the options.

Deliberation. Deliberation is a careful consideration of choices. If we get to this, we like to suggest that our parties talk about each option one by one. They should discuss why they like it or do not like it, what advantages and disadvantages would accrue from each, and what trade-offs they would or would not be willing to make. In deliberation, you may find ways to combine ideas or invent new ones.

It sometimes happens that the parties will come to consensus after deliberating on the options. Other times further discussion is necessary. One interesting approach is to use *scenario deliberation*, in which the parties create alternative stories of the future without being specific about how they might achieve these futures. They deliberate on the merits and drawbacks of each scenario, pull out those aspects of the story they wish to incorporate in a consensual future and then discuss how to get there.

In basic mediation training, you learn that one of the most important aspects of the agreement process is *reality testing*, looking hard at what is acceptable and doable and what is not. If deliberation is done well, the reality testing is embedded in it. By the time the parties go through

careful analysis of their issues, option generation, and deliberation, they have a pretty good idea of what will work and what will not.

We have described a process in which a solid relational base is constructed and a systematic problem solving process is employed. In real life mediations are rarely this tidy. The respect and understanding necessary for collaborative problem solving cannot always be built. Often it is built momentarily, and we discover that relationship issues need to be revisited throughout the session, even during issue framing and deliberation.

Implications for me. Looking back on the full and significant journey of the 1990s, the need to work, teach, and communicate relationally, collaboratively, appreciatively and systemically is clear. Although some techniques were presented here that could be helpful, in the end practitioners must adapt interventions to what is happening relationally, collaboratively, appreciatively and systemically. Let the parties-experiencing-human-difference decide where they want to go, and then work with them to help them get there. My work as a communication consultant is to design and facilitate processes where this commitment can flourish.

2000s: The Naughty Decade (2000–2010)

It was easy to find labels that characterized the previous decades and to refer to the “nineties” or the “eighties.” But a dilemma occurred with the year 2000—what to call this next block of 10 years? The two-thousands? The turn of the century? The “00s” have sometimes been called the “noughties,” which is derived from “nought,” a word used for zero. I reframed this term as the “naughty decade.” Naughty does not just mean disobedient but also mischievous, improper, and tasteless. Although maybe not improper, the period certainly was a time of change and upheaval. This is the decade where Mark Zuckerberg founded Facebook in 2004 in an attempt to enable better human connection for university students. The second social networking site, Twitter, was

formed in 2006 and enabled users to send and receive text-based messages. These social networking tools have defined online communication and blogging in significant ways.

In contrast to the boom in connecting and communicating, many Americans see this decade as the “decade from hell.” It began with the 9/11 terrorist attacks, which redefined global politics and started a couple wars. In 2005 Hurricane Katrina killed more than 1,800 and caused \$125 billion in damages, a stark mid-point to the decade from hell that ended with the Wall Street crash of 2008, where the US stocks recorded their biggest one day fall since the Black Monday crash of 1987. The grim list goes on, with terror alerts, wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and anthrax letters. To further contrast the naughty *decade from hell*, reality TV began to boom, and the world enjoyed watching real people being naughty, caught on camera in a host of in-the-moment life situations.

During this decade, social construction and communication and conflict studies merged as never before. Communication theorists now included social construction as a significant contribution to the field, acknowledging the construction of self, identity, contexts, and reality. Conflict management was transformed by social construction concepts, enabling the emergence of the “Management of Difference” model (Littlejohn & Domenici, 2007), and its corresponding Facework theory (Domenici & Littlejohn, 2006). Appreciative Inquiry went mainstream in this decade, and appreciative questions were a significant part of mediation and social interventions. The following exploration illuminates the merger, and introduces the Management of Difference concept and some examples of its use in practice. Academics and practitioners highlighted storytelling, invited reflexivity in the social construction of difference, and managed face for human communicators. This manuscript section is not organized as the other decades, where

communication and conflict was separate from social construction, but by components of their merging.

Colleagues and pioneers who worked with conflict management from a social construction perspective held the commitment explored in the previous section: to work, teach, and communicate relationally, collaboratively, appreciatively and systemically. How did that commitment show itself in the 2000s?

Privileging stories. Taking people's stories seriously gives opportunity for continued creation of preferred futures. Kevin Barge, a communication professor at Texas A & M, created a method of storytelling questioning (Littlejohn & Domenici 2001) that allows people to hear one another in new, more personal ways. It is a powerful method for helping a group explore its experiences and hopes. It helps people ask good questions and produce effective listening. Stories help listeners and speakers to understand, respect, and appreciate the life experiences and stories of others. It is within these stories that important connections and relationships are taken seriously (Littlejohn & Domenici, 2001, p. 39). One way to explore stories is to ask story questions that bring focus to *situations*, at a particular *time*, occurring in a specific *place*, involving people *who are there*, about *what they do*, and their *hopes for the future*. The following brief examples demonstrate these powerful, yet simple story questions.

Situations

Explore what the situation means to the person.

As a teen, how do you make sense of the situation?

Ask about the relationships among people.

How would you describe your relationship with Bob?

Ask about the relationship among groups of people.

You have said that the families must work very closely with the directors of the youth outreach program. How would describe their relationship?

Time

Ask about the history of situation.

What has brought you to this point?

Explore why this issue has become important at this time.

You said that this issue has only become important during the last five months. Why do you think this has become an important issue now?

Ask when certain people noticed this issue.

This issue has gotten the attention of a number of people. Who was the first to notice this issue? Who was the last?

Place

Explore where people talk about this issue.

You have said that many people in the community are talking about the need to have additional recreational services. Where are people talking about this issue?

Who's there

Focus on who is presently involved with the situation.

You've said that several people have been involved in conversations about drug resistance programs. Who specifically has been involved?

Ask people who else needs to be involved with the situation.

You identified several people who have been involved with these conversations regarding recreational facilities for kids. Who else needs to be involved with these conversations that has not been so far?

Who else needs to be invited to participate in these talks?

Encourage parties to speak from personal experience.

You've talked about how other people would like to see how city government works. Tim, I'm curious about what your personal hopes are for how the city government will work in the future.

Explore other people's perspectives on the situation.

How do you think youth in the Waco area would perceive this situation?

What they do together

Explore the time-line (keep time alive).

I would appreciate it if you would talk about the situation.

When did it begin? What happened first? When X happened, what happened next?

Focus on behaviors.

Jake, you said that you felt mistreated by this group. How did they show their disrespect to you?

Hope for the future

Invite a search for shared concerns and futures.

People who disagree often have the same basic concerns. I want to take a few minutes to explore this possibility here. Could you each take a minute or two to talk about what you think your shared concerns might be?

Move past the problem.

You talked about how much you appreciated the efforts by those people involved with the youth theatre program. And those people have said they also felt they were appreciated then.

I'm wondering what would need to change for that former level of appreciation to return? If it did return, what would be different for you both?

Ask questions about the positive.

What attracted to you to getting involved with the Neighborhood Association? I'm curious about what you really loved about the Neighborhood Association then.

Focus on the future.

It would be very helpful here, I think, if each of you could talk for a few minutes about the kind of crime prevention program you would like to see developed here.

As communicators engage in telling and listening to stories, they are exploring human differences in a respectful way. Littlejohn and Domenici continued their tradition of pushing the frontiers of this exploration of conflict and human difference with the creation of the *Management of Difference* model (Littlejohn & Domenici, 2007). They fully utilized social construction to posit that humans can construct difference and manage their human differences in ways that move them toward preferred futures. This model emerged from the simple idea of the communication perspective and is explored in the next section.

Honor the communication perspective. Normally, communication is considered a process used to transmit information and influence people. This transmission model is useful, but it restricts understanding of the full place and power of communication in human life. For this reason, a broader concept of communication was introduced in which communication is viewed as the inescapable medium in which human beings live. More than a device, communication creates meaning and shapes the very realities in which people live. The symbols and meanings that form human experience are built through communication, and our orientation to every aspect of life is determined by symbolic meanings emerging from social interaction. In short, human

worlds are made in communication. How they communicate is consequential and can have great impact on the worlds in which they live.

For many people, this is a radical idea. It is hard to grasp the point that nothing can exist outside of communication. The claim is not that objects don't exist, but that humans can only know and relate to objects through socially derived meanings. The "things" experienced in life are conceptualized into categories and relations that are constructed through interaction within social groups. Humans orient not only to "objects" in this way but to all forms of experience.

This notion treats communication not as a thing but as a perspective from which any experience can be viewed. Looking at how meanings are constructed, how human beings orient to the world through symbols, and how different people think about life, enables the *communication perspective* (Pearce, 1989). This perspective draws attention to the distinctions people make that help them parse out, or organize, the flux and flow of their experience and to talk about these things with other people. The communication perspective helps communicators see how any aspect of experience is created in communication.

In 2007, Littlejohn and Domenici reinforced this idea that human differences are constructed and managed through communication. Sometimes these differences are seen as valuable, sometimes as problematic, and sometimes as harmful. To explore this thesis, the following section looks at the ways in which differences are constructed and how conflict is made, finally illuminating the merging of communication and conflict with social construction.

How worlds are made. Challenged by intriguing puzzles and problems, scientists formulate fascinating questions and answer these through observation. Fifth graders know that scientists examine something like an insect or dinosaur bone very carefully, sometimes even cutting it apart, so that they can talk more about it. By the time they reach ninth grade, however, students

realize that the process is considerably more complicated than this, as it involves advanced technology and instrumentation, physical and chemical manipulation, and experimentation. Once students get past grasshopper dissection as the paradigm case of science, they realize that the most important discoveries involve relationships, forces, and changes, which can only be observed by looking at many things interacting over time. Science is always telling a story that helps people understand the universe.

What do scientists need to do this kind of work? Clearly, they require technology, tools, and methods. They also need some way to control events so that they can see what happens when one thing impacts another, and they need knowledge and skill to do this. This list of scientific needs is clear enough, but it belies another less obvious list of needs. Science cannot proceed without colleagues, assistants, students, reviewers, grants, universities, research institutions, courses, trainings, textbooks, lectures, demonstrations, papers and publications, theories, conferences, meetings, critiques, debates—all part of the social side of science and all intimately tied to language. Scientists need a set of concepts, or categories and distinctions that usefully classify things. They need scientific terms and mathematical expressions to symbolize these concepts and relations. All of this is worked out socially through communication within the scientific community and beyond.

From a communication perspective, then, science is a social endeavor in which language is used to create categories of understanding and explanation. The world does not wait to be discovered, but must be symbolized, categorized, and organized into useful forms that enable humans to think and talk about it. This is how worlds get made in science.

Worlds are made in ordinary life as well. What people know always comes in one way or another from their experience, and their experience is inextricably social (Leeds-Hurwitz, 1995). A useful question is, “What gets made when people communicate?”

What is made through communication is a set of resources upon which communicators can rely. These resources are meanings, or ways of understanding, which could include values, attitudes, beliefs, moral principles, emotions, perceptions, and theories. Personal identity at any point in life is comprised in part of the resources available, the accomplishments of communication. If someone tells a friend something very private, and this person keeps the secret, they are constructing a relationship of trust. If a study group is very effective in raising everyone’s grade on an exam, the group constructs a feeling of effectiveness. If the boss sets someone up for training and their participation increases their professional performance, a relationship of confidence and loyalty emerge. Over life, symbolic resources are made, remade, expanded, and changed through communication.

These resources are not just material things—like money—that sit there and wait to be used. Instead, symbolic meanings constantly guide actions. The friend confides again in the friend because she thinks she can trust this person. The student enthusiastically attends study-group meetings because of his belief that the group is effective, and the worker performs well at work because of the confidence and loyalty she has developed there. Resources are always tied to practices.

So in addition to asking what is made, it is important to ask *how* it is made. To answer the “how” question, look at the sequence of actions that led to the interactional accomplishment. If someone respects their parents, what interactional sequence led to this accomplishment? If someone trusts their friend, what communication led to this accomplishment? If someone is

loyal to their company, how was this loyalty made in social interaction? The “how” does matter and different patterns of interaction will lead to different interactional accomplishments.

Meanings can and do change, as communication is constantly introducing new perspectives. As people react differently to actions, our existing resources are altered. They not only learn new expressions and meanings, but they see others respond to their actions in new ways, which can shift their understandings of what an action can mean and do. The more diverse the conversational partners, the more expansive the resources can become.

When resources and practices are consistent and self-reinforcing, communicators experience coherence, a feeling of clarity and consistency. Coherence is experienced when resources are clear and unambiguous, actions seem appropriate to what people think should be going on and everyone responds in a way that feels appropriate. Coherence, then, is an achievement. Not all conversations begin coherently, but if they are successful, they will at some point feel coherent. In very tight communities, in which resources are closely guarded and shared, coherence is both expected and common. The group uses a predictable set of practices that continually reinforce their resources, and not much changes. Contemporary life, however, is not so simple, as the lack of coherence challenges what people think they know, feel, and should do.

Conflicts can be coherent and confusing at the same time. They are coherent when the parties are acting in a way that feels consistent with their view of what a conflict should be and how it should be done. They lack coherence when they are unpredictable or inconsistent with what either party might want to be doing. Because of their potential for challenging resources, then, conflicts can produce change. The most important question is what people want to make in an episode of conflict and how they should communicate in order to achieve the social world

they seek. Out of confusion can come a new level of coherence that helps them manage their differences in a constructive and positive way.

Because people do have control over how they communicate, they can and should address the question: “What kind of social world do we want to make, and what new resources do we need to create such a world?” Another way of approaching this question is to look at what would be gained or lost if they had a certain kind of conversation.

The social construction of difference. The meanings constructed in communication are rife with distinctions. Humans draw lines and make borders. They “see” differences—between things, ideas, values, people, and groups. The well-known linguist Ferdinand de Saussure wrote that nothing has meaning in and of itself (Saussure, 1960). Meaning always arises in difference—how things differ from other things, but what people see as similarity or difference is socially constructed. If they are whining about the rain, that must mean that they like fair weather. If they think someone is talking too much, they must prefer people who talk less. If humans did not distinguish between what they want and what they don’t want, there would be no basis for complaint. Distinctions matter. Language and its associated action is a differentiating device. Whenever we speak, on first glance we seem to create a binary. If we say “good” it means “not bad.” This assured categorization invites a metacommunication, a new context for messages that are occurring on several levels simultaneously (Bateson, 1972). Since the number of distinctions people could make is limitless, they must somehow create a useful and manageable set of categories. Unless they are very confused, these categories will come to feel natural and real. It makes sense to distinguish different weather conditions, talkativeness, and political parties. Still, one person’s boundary is another person’s bridge. Many distinctions are widely shared across society, while others are rather local. We can create this

metacommunication by addressing our patterns of communication and how we orient to difference. The following section will illuminate this orientation.

Patterns of communication in the construction of difference. There are several ways to orient to difference: ignore it, embrace it, resist it, fight it, or transform it (Pearce & Littlejohn, 1997). Each of these involves different patterns of communication, and each constructs a different reality around difference.

Ignoring difference. Some of the time, difference seems irrelevant and even lies out of awareness. These are moments when the focus is not on difference, but similarity. One's family may be different from other families, but on certain holidays, they just celebrate being a family without worrying about what is happening with families different from theirs. On the Fourth of July, citizens of the United States celebrate what they have in common and don't think much about their differences. After finishing a major project, a team of technicians celebrates the accomplishment, and they don't want to spoil it by arguing about the conflicts they had along the way.

Pearce (1989) calls such moments monocultural because they are truly of "one" culture. These are times when the way we are doing things seems very natural and unchallenged. Monocultural communication happens without conflict. These are moments when people can just be themselves within a family, organization, community of faith, or other setting without struggling over different identities. This pattern is charmed, because it reproduces the very resources that make it possible. No resources are put at risk, as meanings and actions go unchanged, at least for a while.

It is very important to ignore differences some of the time. What gets made when humans communicate in this way? Here they build important connections with others. They find

common ground and places where they can relax and be themselves without threat of criticism. Ignoring difference is a way to increase the identity of a group or community. It is a way to clarify values and really internalize what is most important. It is really a time where they build ideas about what it means to be a person, have a relationship, or establish a community.

A pattern of ignoring difference, however, can only be momentary for all but the most isolated groups. If a group ignores differences very long, it will seal off their resources into a tight box, which is hard to maintain in today's world. If they stay too long in this pattern, they will also make a social reality that is narrow minded, inflexible, and potentially boring. For this reason, humans must regularly adopt different patterns of communication.

Embracing difference. A second pattern of communication seeks out and celebrates difference. One can use this pattern because difference feels exciting, provides a learning opportunity, or expands our resources in some desired way. This is a pattern commonly seen among sojourners, explorers, and relativists. It is a pattern common in modernity, where growth and change are highly valued.

When communicators are engaged in the pattern in which they embrace difference, they are not willing to leave their resources alone. They are somehow dissatisfied with the limitations on their meanings, values, perceptions, and ways of doing things, and are in search of challenge. Embracing difference, then, is very much a pattern in which they deliberately put their resources at risk.

Although the search for change can be stimulating and expansive, it can also be limiting in its own way. Over time this pattern can makes people feel lost in a maze of constant change, uncertain identity, elusive community, and the inability to find a place to stand. To step back and look at the pattern over a long period of time, one can see a vicious circle: seek change,

celebrate the new, the new becomes old, seek change, celebrate the new, the new becomes old, seek change. Often the pattern of embracing difference in youth gives way to a search for solid identity, a return to one's roots, and a re-definition of values. The desire to try everything shifts to a desire to know one's identity. Living for years in this pattern can turn people into a neo-traditional, a person who goes back in time to a more reliable way of life, someone who returns to a religion abandoned in youth, who takes lessons in the language spoken in his parent's native community, and who moves family relics from the basement to the mantel.

What, then, is made in this pattern of interaction? Embracing difference builds creativity, curiosity, and social change. It creates the value of multi-culturalism, positive intercultural communication, and honor and dignity for all groups. As such, embracing difference is an important and powerful pattern of communication. At the same time, however, embracing difference can lead to confusion, loss of identity, erosion of values and standards, and, in a paradoxical way, the demise of community. In a strange way, embracing difference can cause use to lose important distinctions that give meaning to our lives.

Resisting difference. Embracing difference involves putting one's resources at risk, but most people are not always willing to do this. When one resists difference, they see it clearly, but are not willing easily to give up what is dear to them. People get protective about their beliefs, values, and actions. Their own way of being is taken as normal, and all others as inferior, aberrant, or unacceptable in some way. Patterns of resistance can take many forms, including hard and soft resistance. Soft resistance acknowledges that differences are probably valuable, but that people should debate their respective points of view. They argue, use persuasion, and try to change others in a more-or-less civil way. They recognize that although they may think of their ideas as superior, other people feel the same way about their own ideas, and society must have a

respectful way of working through these conflicts. In a rhetorically eloquent communication, people use their best argumentation and reasoning to demonstrate the validity of their own point of view, and when this fails, they trust legislatures, agencies, and courts of law to settle matters in a democratic way. Soft resistance, then, exists within an atmosphere of pluralism and tolerance.

Hard resistance is different. Sometimes called ethnocentrism, resistance means building a hardened wall around one's way of thinking and doing. They judge all others as inferior, and they do what is necessary to protect and preserve what they think is surely the right form of life. They guard carefully to keep the infidels at bay. Hard resistance is common throughout the world in certain political, religious, and ethnic groups. It is an extreme identification with the resources of one's own identity group. This pattern can be characterized by separatism, defamation, oppression, and sometimes harsher methods.

What do communicators make when they resist difference? Communities are certainly made in this form of communication. Clarity is bred here as well. Solidarity is another product of resistance, and resistance can lead to positive social change, especially where one group is able to overcome the oppression of another group through resistance. But resistance can also be a social reality of right-and-wrong and good-and-bad. It can construct demons and enemies. Rarely is resistance creative, but it is always defensive.

Fighting difference. The need to protect resources sometimes moves from resistance to aggression. Here the pattern is one of moving to repress a group whose beliefs, attitudes, values, and actions endanger one's own. It often results from the frustration that occurs when softer forms of resistance fail, and people feel that their way of life is truly threatened by others. When

humans fight difference, persuasion becomes diatribe, display becomes violence, influence becomes force, and tolerance becomes persecution.

Although stakeholders may fight for land, natural resources, or material advantage, this form of communication most often has a moral base. People believe so strongly that they are threatened, that they “take to the streets.” Ascher (1986) found that violent organizations in the United States and abroad tend to have three characteristics: They have a strong identity with the in-group, they share a sense of moral indignation about the actions of the out-group, and they believed that the other group hates them. Extreme groups justify violence, not merely to repress, but to achieve important moral goals.

Transforming difference. Each of the earlier patterns of communication aim to preserve, protect, or change groups’ resources, or ways of thinking and forms of action. The fifth pattern aims to think about difference differently. In other words, in this pattern, communicators aim to coordinate the resources of different groups, find ways to coordinate these, and achieve a level of communication that allows all stories to be told and heard without asking anyone to give up what is important to them. This pattern acknowledges difference, but it also acknowledges what is shared—that humans all use language and other expressive forms to construct the realities that impact their lives; they all have resources formed in their unique social histories; they all make distinctions and note the ways they are different from others; they all have communities with which they identify; they are all cultural beings; and everyone has experiences that provide a moral basis for their actions.

This pattern of communication, then, both acknowledges similarity and difference. This is what Pearce and Littlejohn (1997) called the metastory of humanity. When people work to transform difference, they do not place this story at risk because it serves them well in moving

into new patterns of interaction in which their differences can be expressed, understood, and new forms of relationship established.

What does this pattern look like? It has several characteristics. It is a pattern in which individuals say what is important to them without trying to change others. It is a pattern in which individuals listen deeply to what others are saying in an attempt to understand their social worlds. It is a pattern in which participants tell stories from their experience to help others get a glimpse of their social world. It is a pattern in which communicators attempt to build respect, come to some understanding of both the powers and limits of their respective social worlds, and learn significant new things. It is a pattern in which change is possible but not the primary objective.

This fifth pattern of communication is idealistic, yet it can and is often experienced. It is usually difficult, however, because people are unaccustomed to this form of communication, and their social realities frequently do not include the possibility of talking and listening in these ways. In contrast to the normal discourse of protection and persuasion, this pattern represents an abnormal discourse, in which people walk the narrow ridge between being who we are and being profoundly open to the other (Pearce & Pearce, 2000).

This fifth pattern is a search for a set of second-order resources, a set of categories that can be used to transcend differences and allow people to talk in ways that bring about learning, reflection, and respect—a place where diversity is seen as a positive resource that can benefit everyone.

Managing human difference. These second-order categories allow us to transcend human differences and escape polarization and the search for right and wrong. This place allows a coordination of human differences in order to find the place where diversity is a positive

resource. Communicators can think of the world of human differences in terms of four spheres—areas of life commonly encountered and managed. The first of these is the *sphere of irrelevance*. Because voices in this sphere are solo or unified, difference does not matter. This is a monocultural area in which people celebrate similarity and build on what we have in common.

In the *sphere of value*, people are very much aware of difference, and they appreciate it. They see differences as a positive resource. It is a world of diversity, and people build on the many different resources available. While the sphere of irrelevance is usually easy, the sphere of value takes work. Because people are faced with new perspectives and ways of doing things within this sphere, they must be willing to explore and work with ideas different from their own. At some point, working with difference begins to become a challenge. It creates problems and obstacles that are not easily overcome. At this point, they cross over from the sphere of value to the sphere of challenge.

The *sphere of challenge* is not necessarily negative. Differences can still be viewed as valuable, and the hard work of managing those differences can itself be salutary. At the same time, however, the sphere of challenge often brings frustration, even exasperation, and people begin to act in ways that are harmful to all or some of the parties involved. At this point, communicators enter the *sphere of harm*.

Conflict spans the spheres of harm, challenge, and value. Conflicts can be valued, they can be challenging, and they can be harmful. The chief proposition in this Management of Difference concept is that *communicators should manage differences in a way that avoids moving toward harm and encourages moving toward value*. In other words, they should manage differences in ways that increase dignity and honor, make creative problem solving possible, make use of diversity as a positive resource, acknowledge a multi-vocal world, minimize both

confusion and destruction, provide opportunities for coherence and meaning in life, and continue the rich texture of difference that characterizes the human condition.

Consultants, teachers, and other conflict management specialists can use this model to guide their work with communicators. It was during the “naughty” era that such a common sense method of managing human difference evolved (Figure 3).

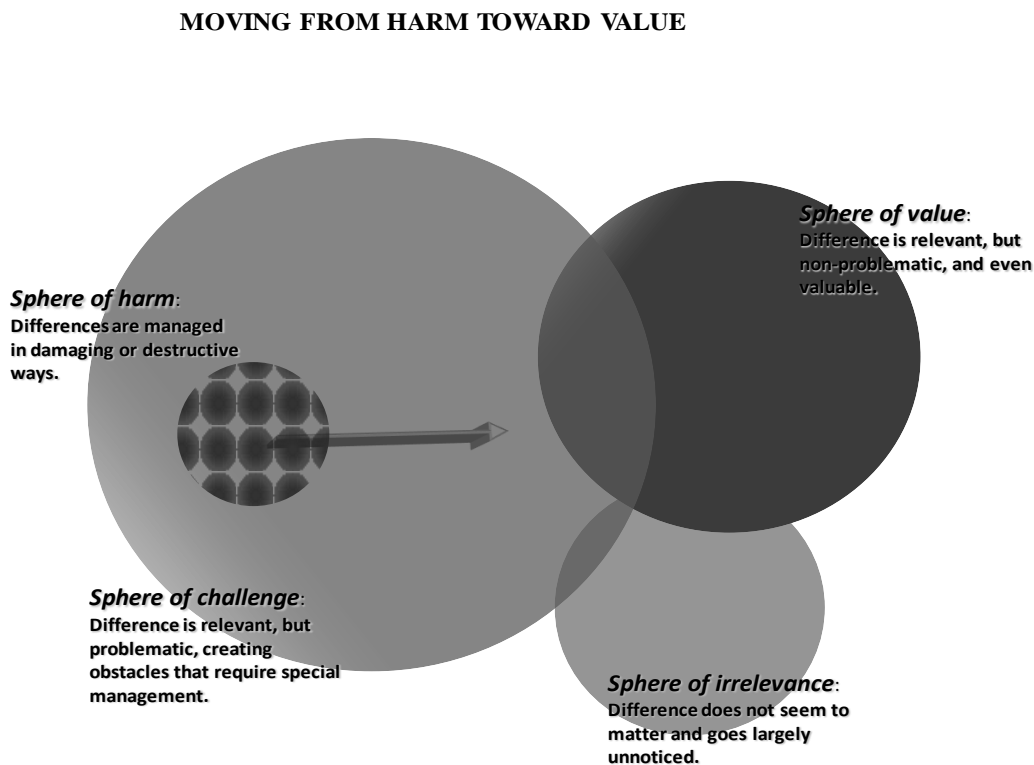


Figure 3: World of Difference orientation (Littlejohn & Domenici 2007)

It was during this same decade that Littlejohn and Domenici developed this World of Difference orientation (Figure 3) which helped to bridge the two disciplines: communication and conflict, and social construction. To build upon that bridge, the concept of facework was

introduced as one of the keys to communication in the management of human difference (Domenici & Littlejohn, 2006).

The social construction of face. The human face is so important in personal expression that it has become a symbol of close personal interaction and a significant component of the management of difference. People use expressions like “face-to-face,” “face time,” “in your face,” and “saving face.” In other words, the metaphor of face is powerful in bringing many aspects of personal communication to the fore. Within the metaphor, face is equated to public identity—the “you” presented to others.

The metaphor of face designates the universal desire to present oneself with dignity and honor. The idea of face probably originated in China, where it referred to respectability in terms of character and success. It involved a kind of reciprocated respect or deference. Erving Goffman (1967), who wrote extensively about the presentation of self, popularized the concept of face in the United States. Goffman showed how face can be “lost,” “maintained,” “protected,” or “enhanced.” These outcomes are accomplished through the work of communication, or facework. Domenici and Littlejohn (2006) defined *facework* as *a set of coordinated practices in which communicators build, maintain, protect, or threaten personal dignity, honor, and respect*.

Constructive facework is a vital aspect of all interpersonal communication. If communicators do it well, they build relationships, they reinforce their own competence as communicators, and they make interaction more rewarding and less distressing (Cupach & Metts, 1994, p. 15-16). Parents teach their children how to do good facework from the time they can put a full sentence together: Be polite, answer people when they talk to you, be respectful, present yourself well, and be kind. As fundamental as it is, facework remains one of the most

challenging aspects of communication well into adulthood, especially in complex, systemic situations.

Face and the social construction of self. Robyn Penman (1994) wrote, “The nature of our self-identity and the constancy of it are a function of the communicative practices in which we are situated. If, for example, our practices are constant, then so too will the self-identity we avow. And if our practices are varied and complex then so too will be our self-identity” (p. 21). The identities people co-construct with their mother, their best friend, and their rabbi are not the same, because these relational contexts are different. They are always re-making themselves in interaction with others. These identities have implications beyond specific relationships, however, as relationships connect to one another within larger communities. Communities, too, have an identity that impacts the roles and responsibilities of their members.

Perhaps Rom Harré (1984) was the first to make a distinction between the social construction of the *person* and that of the *self*. Personhood is the concept of the human being shared widely within a community, while the self is one individual’s personal view of how he or she fits into that ideal. Another way of saying this is that the group has a “theory” of personhood, and a person has a “theory” of what kind of person they are. The social construction of identity, then, consists of both a shared and personal images—an idea of *persons-in-general* and *I myself as a person*. The sociologist Erving Goffman (1959) was firm in the belief that no one has a single, unified self. People often think that if they are honest, they will come in touch with who they “really” are. Because self-identity is always being constructed in relationship to others, people have many “selves.” Because they are a member of many communities, they are influenced by numerous ideas of personhood. One’s identity is always made in how they present themselves, how they act within the situations in which they live and work.

At the same time, however, people will normally have a coherent sense of self. In their mind, they organize their many portrayals into a picture or idea of their identity. They may not “perform” all aspects of this coherent self at all times, but it lies there in their consciousness as an overall context or picture of who they think they are. Others also see patterns in others’ behavior that make it possible for them to identify others as a coherent being. Indeed, a coherent sense of self is vital to mental health, as it gives life meaning. Identity confusion, which people all experience from time to time, can be a problem; when it persists, it may become a mental health issue as well. Indeed, psychotherapy can help one gain greater coherence in life.

Coherence does not necessarily imply consistency. Identity is often complex. A person might define themselves as a “complicated, adaptable, growing person.” With this definition, they would eschew consistency and value diversity in their own behavior. They might pride themselves in thinking through each situation. Others, who tell them that they are amazingly complex and unpredictable, would actually reinforce this view. In this scenario, behavioral diversity is not a source of confusion, but achieves clarity.

The coherent self—whether simple or complex—serves as a foundation or anchor for making decisions about how to act with other people, a standard with which to evaluate one’s own behavior, and a baseline from which to grow and change. Over time, of course, self-identity shifts as people encounter new situations, new conversation partners, and new challenges. Communicators probably would not want to be the same person when they are 60 that they were when they were 20, though there may be aspects of identity that they would like to retain. An interesting exercise is to reflect on the question, how am I different than I was five years ago, 10 years ago, 20 years ago? No matter how people change, however, they always want to present themselves to others as a person worthy of respect.

These significant contributions during the naughty decade, established a firm bond between communication and conflict studies, conflict management, and social construction. Human differences can be managed by acknowledging the zone of challenge, harm, relevance or irrelevance while deciding how best to manage face for communicators as they travel from one zone to another. How do communicators perform this management over time, intending to socially create their preferred identity and social world? A certain type of awareness is essential for such a commitment.

Reflexivity as a way to co-create meaning. *Reflexivity* is an unusual term denoting a certain kind of reflection or awareness, but it is more than simple observation and attentiveness to detail. The word means that a person is open to the many meanings that people create when they interact together. When people are reflexive, they are aware of their own role in making meaning with others. Reflexivity also involves actively looking for the many possible ways to understand what is going on in a situation. For example, if a person is reflexive, s/he will understand that the way in which s/he frames a problem will encourage certain kinds of solutions and discourage others. S/he will actively experiment with various forms, knowing that each has certain powers and limits. Because it deliberately plays with diverse meanings and interpretations, reflexivity is a habit especially appropriate for the management of difference.

When encountering a conflict, for example, a reflexive manager (or any other member of the workforce) might (1) think of the conflict not as an obstacle, but as an opportunity for problem solving; (2) reframe the issue from emotional reaction to substantive issues; (3) turn the situation into an opportunity for facework; (4) present a variety of options for resolution such as negotiation, mediation, or adjudication; (5) shift attention from positions to interests and then to mutual interests. Notice how each of these moves requires the manager to understand that the

situation has many possible framings, that each framing has both powers and limits, and that the way in which he or she acts in this situation will have consequences. Notice too that reflexivity of this type involves a constant movement of the mind, an awareness of one's own involvement in the system, and a willingness to experiment with a variety of possible approaches.

Crafting conversational frameworks. In his study of the reflexive managerial practice, Kevin Barge (2004) identified a pattern he calls *invitational reflexivity*, which means carefully attending to the forms of communication needed to build effective outcomes that are based on a diversity of thinking and consciously exploring processes in which managers and others can act effectively together. Invitational reflexivity means inviting others into a new kind of conversation that is appreciative of difference, yet permits participants to co-create successful outcomes. One aspect of this kind of work is *crafting conversational frameworks* that involve establishing the context, purpose, and desired outcomes of meetings, interviews, and other forms of communication that work groups may employ. A conversational framework is like a container in which employees can communicate. Whether a brief “floor” meeting at the beginning of the shift, a weekly staff meeting, an impromptu meeting between manager and staff, a performance evaluation, an Internet chat room, or any number of other forums, the conversational framework will acknowledge the culture and rules of the organization, but may stretch these into new realms in which beneficial outcomes might emerge.

The appreciative turn. During the decade from 2000 to 2010, Appreciative Inquiry remained a powerful communication tool to enable the shift from statements of what people want and need to a conversation about how they are relating to one another and how to explore new patterns of interaction that might work better for them. As depicted on timeline of the “Appreciative Inquiry Commons,” the 1980s and 1990s saw Appreciative Inquiry research,

practice, and leadership blossom and become significant for social change. Numerous books and articles depict that evolution, but the simple fact remains: Questioning after positive resources brings attention to those resources and increased opportunities for building a world with those resources. *Appreciative questions*, or “appreciative inquiry” as David Cooperrider and his colleagues introduced the term, is designed to plumb the positive resources in the system on which participants can rely for constructive change (Cooperrider, Barrett & Srivastva, 1995). Appreciative questions can change the context of the discussion from negative, destructive talk to positive, constructive dialogue.

In essence, appreciative questions ask people to reflect on the positive. Appreciative questions have several qualities:

- *These questions ask participants to tell about positive experiences.*
- *They help parties explore the positive shadow behind concerns and complaints.*
- *They ask about the positive energy driving a negative situation.*
- *They encourage parties to imagine positive futures.*

Like systemic questions, appreciative questions should be asked in a conversational and natural way in a language with which the parties can identify. As much as possible, they should adapt to what the parties are talking about in the moment. They can also be used during a pause to redirect the discussion.

Elsbeth McAdam told of work she once did with skinheads in Sweden, having been hired to do therapy with this violent group. In this work, she took three appreciative avenues. First, she asked them to talk about what they gained from kicking people around. It gave them a thrill, they said. Next, she asked them how violence benefited them. People paid attention to them, they claimed. Then she asked them to talk about times in their lives when they got a thrill by

means other than violence and times when people paid attention to them without violence. She then explored with them how they might get what they wanted, thrill and attention, without hurting anyone.

In 2008, a group of Taos Institute founders produced a revised edition of a book and accompanying concept that further shifted organizational paradigms. *The Appreciative Organization* evolved from the collaboration of Harlene Anderson, David Cooperrider, Kenneth Gergen, Mary Gergen, Sheila McNamee, Jane Watkins, and Diana Whitney (2008). Using social construction and appreciative inquiry, the authors offered insight from their own organizational work, exploring the creation of organizations that are life-giving, value-seeking, and relational-centered.

Another example of the appreciative turn occurred with the contribution of Sonja Foss and Karen Foss and their idea that people can take more responsibility to create healthy social worlds by the invitation to engage with the other (Foss & Foss, 2003; Foss & Griffin, 1995). They introduced a new notion about communication that is rooted in the idea of an invitation. Called *invitational rhetoric*, the object is to engage communicators to achieve understanding and joint contribution to an issue under consideration. The speaker and the listener gain a greater understanding of the complexity of that issue. Along with that greater understanding of the issue could come enhanced understanding of each other. When a communicator invites someone into a communication interaction, they may use statements such as,

- I am hoping to discuss this issue with you. How can we talk about it in a way so we both contribute to the discussion and offer ideas for addressing the dilemma?
- There are a few things I would like to discuss with all of you today. It is really important to me that we end this meeting with some shared understanding. Before I begin, could

we go around the room, introduce ourselves, and share our perspective on the challenge we are here to discuss tonight.

- I can see that you feel very strongly about this problem. Let's move these chairs around so we are all sitting together. What would you most like to happen as a result of this conversation?
- What is it about this issue that makes you feel so strongly about it?

Catching ourselves in the act. A grand gathering that further solidified social construction and its powerful contribution both to the communication discipline as a whole, and to the growing field of conflict management occurred in Albuquerque, New Mexico, in 2006. The National Communication Association held its summer institute with the title, "*Catching ourselves in the act: A collaborative planning session to enrich our discipline through social constructionist approaches.*" As mentioned earlier, of the many results and ripples that emerged from the gathering was an edited book, *Socially Constructing Communication* (Galanes & Leeds-Hurwitz, 2009). Each chapter works together to evaluate and support the influence of social construction on theory, research, and practice, and open further discussion about the future of those ripples. The book begins with a compilation of common principles of social construction along with a set of core readings. What follows are intriguing, humorous, significant, and invigorating chapters, which revolve around the central role of social construction in the communication field, as eloquently stated in Chapter 2 by Barnett Pearce in *Communication and Social Construction: Claiming our Birthright* (Pearce, 2009). He is firm with his offering, "I believe that there is a natural affinity between "communication" (as a process and as a field of study/practice) and social construction. In fact, one could build a strong argument that social

construction is the modern expression of the sensibility in which the discipline of communication began” (Pearce, 2009, p. 17).

Reflections on the decade. What a wild ride this decade was for me. Stephen Littlejohn and I published three books, which resulted from our frequent reflections on our practice. We continued to ask ourselves: *What are we creating by our communication choices?* We sometimes called ourselves “process managers” and saw during the 2000s how important the design of a high quality communication process was. Good process matters, whether the group is experiencing an open conflict or not. Even when a group anticipates challenging differences, they can actively think about how to structure the process to keep communication productive and avoid open, ugly clash. Each group will be different, and each will require a somewhat different process, but in general several sensibilities can help guide process design work. These are affirmation, empowerment, connection, inclusion, inquiry, and creativity (Barge, 2013, pp. 517-544).

Affirmation. The sensibility of affirmation is the belief in possibilities and faith that the participants will have positive resources to engage in constructive communication. Affirmation tunes into opportunities to explore and make use of previous successes, visions, values, and good will. It allows participants to think about what they appreciate in themselves, others, and in the situation (Cooperrider & Whitney, 1999). The spirit of affirmation does not mean that we ignore, or even minimize, problems and concerns, only that we are willing to move beyond these to look for forces that can transcend hostility, rigidity, and polarity.

Sometimes people are willing to be affirmative from the beginning—especially when an open conflict has not already erupted. People may also be willing to take an appreciate turn late in a conflict cycle, when they are fatigued and ready to move to a more positive place. However,

disputants in hard conflicts are not usually ready to be affirmative. Participants may feel cheated if they do not have an opportunity to vent, express strong emotion, or share their worries and anger. The process may permit or even invite this within a safe environment but will not stop there. As soon as possible, good dialogue processes mine the positive visions lying below complaints and problems, explore stories of success, and seek out common values and interests. We like to call this the “wisdom in the whining,” which means that complaints always contain a more positive vision of how things might be. If you are upset that you are not getting your mail every day, you must value prompt service; if you are tired of a coworker’s radio, you must value peace and quiet; and if you wish your pastor were a better preacher, you must desire to be engaged, inspired, and spiritually awakened in worship. Each negative complaint has a “positive shadow,” and an affirmative sensibility will lead process designers to think creatively of ways to bring this out.

Stephen Littlejohn and I were once called in to work with a highly conflicted nursing department in a local hospital. When we talked to them individually, the nurses expressed extreme anger and disappointment with one another. They were unable to interact professionally and had completely lost respect for one another. We had originally intended to conduct individual mediations among these coworkers, but it was clear to us that they would be unable to talk constructively in mediation sessions. We realized that as a group, they would first need an opportunity to hear new kinds of things from one another and begin to build a positive base for conflict resolution.

We invited the nurses to have a facilitated meeting to begin communicating in a new way. Using a strong set of ground rules, we started by asking them, one at a time, to share a story about a time in their careers in which they felt affirmed, strengthened, encouraged, and effective.

During this go-round, the coworkers were able to talk about their careers in positive terms without having to worry about being interrupted, refuted, or ignored. They were free to talk about positive rather than negative stories, which was an entirely new pattern for them. In the next round, we asked them to indicate what changes would be necessary in the workplace to make it possible for them to do their jobs effectively. A rule used during this round was that they could not refer to other members of the group, but had to think of the workplace as a whole. We then asked each person to indicate how they thought the group could work together in a way that would integrate a diversity of personalities and styles. Once we gave the participants a chance to address these questions, we invited them to ask questions of curiosity to one another to learn more and understand their respective experiences more completely. Again, we followed a set of ground rules at this point to make sure that people did not use their questions as a form of attack, defense, or posturing. This technique turned out to be an effective dialogue process for this group, as they began to build some trust. It did not solve their issues, but it did make it possible for them to move on to private mediations where they could address specific workplace issues in a safe, private environment.

Empowerment. In short, empowerment means having a process that enables participants to express what is most important to them and do so in a way that can be heard by others. Empowerment means finding the means by which individuals can use their own sources of power—their own best forms of expression—to “say” what they have experienced, what they think, how they feel, what they want, and what matters most to them. Unbridled expression may allow one person to be clear, while stomping on others’ abilities to do the same. For this reason, the process must be one that permits both expression and reception—talking and listening. You

are not empowered if others cannot hear or appreciate what you have to say. In process design, empowerment may require a variety of things:

- You may need to include opportunities for different forms of expression. Not everyone is empowered by speech. In fact, reticent individuals may find “talking,” especially in large groups, to be intimidating.
- You may have to pay attention to potential problems of domination in which certain individuals will want to “set the agenda” or lead the course of the discussion, which can derail attempts to allow everyone the freedom to establish what is important to them.
- You may need to build in a variety of “venues” or structures of dialogue, including, for example, individual writing, dyads, small groups, and large groups.
- Participants may need to have opportunities to revisit and reconsider their ideas, reality test their ideas, and change their mind.
- The process may need to include opportunities to get information and increase knowledge.
- Even a clear agenda and focus for discussion can be empowering because it enables people to think clearly about various issues and clarify what is important on each.

An effective tool for empowerment taught by the Public Conversations Project is the “go-round.” As mentioned earlier, using this technique, participants in a dialogue group each take a turn to talk about their experience or address a question without interruption. The go-round is a listening exercise, in which the goal is to express and hear what is important to each person without formulating a response, answer, or rebuttal to what he or she has to say. It encourages listening because you formulate your own “speech” in advance and take your turn when the

circle gets to you, so that you are not rehearsing or planning your comments while others are speaking. And for those who may, for whatever reason, feel they do not want to contribute, a pass rule makes it possible to remain silent without question.

Stephen Littlejohn and I facilitated a meeting of about 120 teachers at a local high school who were experiencing considerable strife among themselves and with the administration. We knew going in that emotions would run high and that some teachers would not feel safe to talk about the issues involved. Safety and empowerment would be key. In order to maximize empowerment, we did a variety of things:

1. We asked the administrators to be “keynote listeners,” so that they would be in a new, non-dominating role and could hear clearly what was important to teachers. As keynote listeners, they did not participate by speaking, but by listening.
2. We gave participants individual writing time to think through what they wanted to say.
3. We had both small and large group discussion.
4. We had participants build a wall mural of issues of concern.
5. We gave out a form so that participants could write their responses if they felt they had something to say that was not heard.
6. We interviewed the keynote listeners (the administrators) at the end about what they heard the teachers say, what seemed most important to the teachers, and what the next steps should be.

Connection. Dialogue processes should enable participants to think beyond their individual needs and aims to become conscious of a system of relationships. Our conflicts are made by social interaction between people, but disputants do not always realize or recognize this. Good

dialogue processes are able to bring participants into awareness of communication and connection and allow them to build on this collaboratively.

Connection can be established by exploring common history, shared concerns, community values, or goals that require collaboration to achieve. *Timelining* is an interesting method in which connection can be brought into awareness. Members of a community or organization put a large piece of butcher paper on the wall with a line running horizontally down the middle and years placed at intervals along the line. They then put their names at the appropriate period in which they joined the group and talk a bit about what was going on in the organization or community at that time. The timeline goes beyond the current date into the future, and members can talk about what they would like to see happen with the group in coming years and decades. This is an excellent technique for building a common history and beginning to generate a common vision for the future.

One of the most common and effective methods for establishing connection is to help participants move from negotiating individual demands to framing and working together to solve a problem. This approach, integrative problem solving (discussed also in the appendix), involves framing the issue as a problem, generating options for solution, and together deliberating and making decisions about how to proceed. Families have this kind of dialogue from time to time. Instead of arguing about whether a 16-year old can get a car, the family could discuss ways to meet everyone's transportation needs. Several options, including a car for the teen, can be weighed and discussed jointly. The car issue cannot adequately be discussed in isolation. Because family members are connected, their needs must be looked at together, and trade-offs may be necessary. If the teenager gets the car, his need for status and transportation may get met, but the parents will have to sacrifice some money and a good deal of sleep.

If two workers were having a mediation over how to organize a storage room, the mediator might ask them who uses the room, who cares most about how it is organized, and who is most impacted by decisions related to storage and the way it is organized. The sensibility of connection raises the question of who should be at the table and involved in the dialogue, which connections are most important, and which relationships are most impacted by the discussion?

Inclusion. This sensibility essentially honors the value of difference. We want processes that include a diversity of perspectives on the issues at hand. In certain cases, this means making sure that all stakeholder groups are represented at the table. Sometimes this is not possible, so we try to be as inclusive as we can. If it is not possible to have full inclusion at one event, perhaps multiple events will add diversity to the mix.

The spirit of inclusion is more than getting many people into the room. It also means designing processes by which different points of view can be heard, respected, and used as a basis for any action that might come out of the discussion. Inclusion and empowerment complement one another. They must exist side by side. Empowerment centers on what participants can contribute, and inclusion centers on what they can gain.

An attitude of inclusion alerts us to the need for diversity, but there are practical considerations that make it challenging. Certain parties may not be willing to participate in the dialogue. Certain participants may make other participants feel unsafe, endangering their sense of empowerment. There may be group-size and resource constraints that make full inclusion impossible. In general, we use the following guidelines to make decisions about who should be involved in a process:

1. How many people can effectively engage in the process? Sometimes space, time, and money allow a few hundred people to participate, and other times only a handful.

2. Who has information, important perspectives, and ideas that would enhance the discussion?
3. Who are the most important stakeholders? In other words, who has the most to gain or lose from possible outcomes?
4. Who is involved in key relationships, and what relationships may need to be transformed?
5. Who would most benefit from the kinds of learning that will occur in the dialogue?
6. Who, if left out, might try to subvert the process?

When we are creating processes for conflict management, we try to be inclusive from the beginning. In a two-party mediation, we ask the parties to talk about their needs and how best to approach the mediation. We may check with them at several points in the mediation about whether the process is working. If a small group is involved, we may interview everyone in advance to discover their process needs and solicit process suggestions. And in a larger group, community, or organization, we work with a design team consisting of a diversity of representatives from the system.

Stephen Littlejohn and I once facilitated a multi-stakeholder engagement process to plan improvements in information technology for the 35 Indian colleges and universities within the United States. The diverse design team worked for nearly a year, before and during the process, to make decisions about how to proceed. One of the most important questions was who should be included in the processes, and we spent considerable time on this issue. We knew that it would be fruitless to limit participation to the tribal colleges, so we expanded participation to include representatives from government, funding agencies, technology companies, tribal governments, the general public, and even international representatives of indigenous education

systems abroad. Over the year, we worked with various size groups ranging from 40 to 150. Since then, we have worked at several individual tribal colleges facilitating strategic planning processes. When we do this, we want to make sure that faculty, students, administration, staff, board members, and community members are involved. In the best cases, the college will sponsor several planning meetings for particular stakeholder groups, so that each voice can be heard.

Inquiry. The spirit of inquiry leads us to think about the interaction differently. Instead of arguing, debating, pressuring, or winning and losing, we see ourselves as engaged in a process of mutual discovery. We shift from, “Who will prevail?” to, “What do we have to learn?” We shift from an “all-knowing” position to a “not-knowing” one. Instead of an opportunity influence, we see communication as ground for exploration, or “collective tinkering.”ⁱ

You can tell that change is afoot when a mediator, after hearing long series of harangues, summarizes what each person has said and then says, “Okay, it is clear that you have very different opinions on this issue and that neither of you are really persuaded. What do you want to do about this?” This question invites the parties to shift gears and think about discovering a new path. The same kind of shift can happen after the opening statements of an environmental negotiation, when the facilitator says, “Thank you for offering your initial perspectives and hopes. In order to move forward constructively, we will need a common body of information and facts. Let’s talk about how to do fact finding in a way that is acceptable to all of you.”

As another example, consider the case of a young man who drops out of college during his junior year. His parents are furious. After having spent thousands of dollars on his education, they feel betrayed. Their natural response is to strike out: “What?! How can you do this?” and then to demean, “You unappreciative jerk . . . after all we have done for you!” The son’s reply—

if there is one—is predictable: “Get off my back. You think that you control my life. Forget it, I don’t want your money.” This exchange will probably make relations a bit chilly for a few months (years?), but could be transformed into a very different kind of dialogue in which the parents eventually talk openly with their son about his frustrations, goals, hopes, and fears, and he opens up to their worries, experience, and ideas. Shifting from a polarized atmosphere of hostility, this family can move into a dialogue of inquiry—to learn from each other, ask hard questions, and explore important issues of life.

When we facilitated public engagement events on protection against mountain lions in Arizona, we knew the discussions could become quite contentious and heated. Some participants, such as foothills homeowners, would strongly favor removing, even killing, the lions in order to protect the residents. We knew that other stakeholders, such as conservationists, would favor protecting the animal and preventing developers from building homes so close to wild lands. Transforming the conversation from a debate into a mutual inquiry would be important. Instead of having participants stand up and give a series of speeches, which would almost certainly guarantee the former, we asked instead that they systematically explore in small groups various options for how the fish and game agency should respond when there were (1) sightings, (2) interactions, (3) threats, and (4) attacks. In other words, we tried to shift the process from one of contention to one of inquiry.

Creativity. Another factor that should be taken into consideration in process design is a creative sensibility, the understanding that there are no pat formulas or formats, but that dialogue processes require creative thinking and adaptability. Good mediators and facilitators are creative, even imaginative, in how they think about process. Wise parents, smart managers, effective educators, and experienced diplomats maintain the same attitude: “Hm, this is

interesting. How can we structure a process here that will be engaging, safe, constructive, and effective?” Barge (2006) said that community engagement processes require “capturing the imagination of participants, which involves creative events that inspire one’s imaginative abilities” (p. 538).

Creativity in design does not mean wild experimentation. It certainly does not imply that anything should be tried. Participants, as well as mediators and facilitators, have experience with various processes that have worked in the past, but they may need to combine these in new combinations or even construct new tools and techniques as needed. Design teams can be very helpful, in part because they expand the number of creative minds in the developing a process. We commonly train a design team in various standards, goals, and techniques for dialogue processes and then facilitate the team’s creative discussion of how to design a particular upcoming event or events. Often this is an incremental process: The design team may put a macro-process in place, establishing the stages or series of events to be conducted, and then after each stage more specifically design the process for the next stage.

Just thinking back on the many processes we have participated in designing, here is a list of some techniques we have used to (1) engage participants, (2) empower them, (3) bring out their best thinking, (4) use difference as a positive resource, and (5) break destructive patterns of interaction:

- Collaborative wall murals
- Fish-bowl interviews
- Participants interviewing one another
- Written forms and questionnaires
- Metaphors and stories

- Individually created posters
- Collaboratively created charts
- Creating newspaper headlines
- A dreamcatcher basket, in which participants placed written hopes and dreams
- Honoring ideas on scrolls tied with ribbons
- Guided tours
- Native American dancing and prayers
- Songs and music

I include this list to illustrate how imagination can help when trying to achieve constructive communication, but I have to be careful here and not give the impression that dialogues are always just cute “techniques.” These must be part of carefully crafted, purposeful, adapted, and effective overall processes for change in what often proves to be difficult conversations.

Process design, then, is an important element in helping parties to communicate in new ways. The second key to making such communication possible is setting the right context or focus for the discussion. What questions does the group address? How do they frame their issues, and how do they organize the topics they want to talk about? These are questions of context.

Finding the best context. The context is the topical frame for dialogue. It is the question that the group addresses. The context of discussion may be broad, narrow, wide-ranging, or quite focused. Constructive conversation depends in large measure on how the issue is framed. Individuals, groups, and organizations embroiled in conflict may find it unsafe to talk about allegations and hostilities, but it might be possible for them to talk about common values, goals, or future visions. It may be hard to talk about anger, hurt, and resentment but easier to talk about personal experience. A community terrified about opening the subject of race relations may be

able to explore “cultural richness.” Concerns about crime and violence may lock a group into certain ways of thinking that are released and broadened when they shift the topic to “community safety.” An organization that is riddled with complaints about unprofessional and disrespectful behavior may find it possible to move forward by having a dialogue on how to make a productive and comfortable work environment.

Once a topic becomes too dangerous to discuss—or too risky—it becomes an “undiscussable issue.” Issues can become undiscussable when there is a strong history of hostility between the parties, disputants are unable to frame the issue in a way that leads to any kind of constructive conversation, the issue brings forth an unwanted repetitive pattern that does damage, or the parties worry that discussing the issue will result in personal attack, misunderstanding, or face damage of some sort. Undiscussable issues also arise when the parties are so entrenched in their own point of view that discussion of solutions seems fruitless. Talking to the “other side” might even show some level of weakness that disputants are not willing to admit. It is amazing how family, coworkers, and community members tell you privately exactly what is bothering them, but find it impossible to discuss this with one another. Undiscussable issues signal a stuck spot that must be transcended if parties are to move forward together.

Context setting as scoping. The metaphor of the scope, be it a telescope or microscope, is helpful because it implies that a lens is pointed at something. Just like a photographer looking for the right frame, you can always “scope out” to a broader topic, “scope in” to a narrower one, or “scope around” to different perspectives. When people were unable to talk about their views on abortion in any constructive way, the Public Conversations Project was able to help them *scope in* to discuss the details of their experience. When community members were stuck on the

issue of crime and violence, they found it helpful to *scope out* to the broader subject of community safety.

Mediators are very good at helping parties move from one context to another. When divorcing parents are unable to get past their disagreement about sharing time with the children, the mediator asks them to shift topics from time demands to their children's needs. When coworkers are attacking one another for workplace behavior, the mediator may ask them to talk about the work environment in general; and when one neighbor is complaining about a barking dog, the conversation may shift to what makes a good neighborhood or what the neighbors like about living there. Not only may conversation take a positive turn when the context shifts, but the parties may find the seeds of fruitful discussion on the original issue. Spending some time talking about their children may help the parents better understand the children's needs and what each parent can provide. A discussion about the workplace environment may help coworkers see that problems are not personal but systemic. And discussing the qualities of a good neighborhood may bring a variety of issues to light on dog barking, including the need for peace and quiet as well as safety and security. In each of these cases, scoping to a new context can provide the basis for collaborative problem solving in each case. Notice that in each case of scoping—redirecting to a new context—the parties fundamentally shift the question they are discussing. When parties get stuck, they would be well advised to query, “Are we even asking the right questions here?”

Context setting questioning. The questions a group addresses will determine in large measure the content of their discussion. If you ask participants what they want, they may become engaged in a struggle between competing demands. For this reason, many mediators never start with this question. If you ask participants why they think they are right, they

exchange arguments and look for you to decide which one is correct. Such questions may be an appropriate question in court, but they are not very productive when participants are engaged in a dialogue. Notice how each of the following sets of questions, suggested by Ferdig (2001), focuses the discussion in a different direction:

To focus on identity: Who am I? What is important to me? Who are we together? What do we both care about? What does each of us bring to this conversation based on our previous experience around the topic that brings us together?

To focus on principles: What do I stand for? What do we jointly stand for? How do our choices and actions reflect our individual and collective values? How do we want to interact with one another? What might that process look like? What can we agree on?

To focus on intentions: Where am I going? What do I want to see happen here? What are we up to in this conversation? What can we create together that brings us to where we want to be?

To focus on exploration of possibility: What are the things you value most about yourself? What are the core factors that give “life” and “energy” to the group? What are the possibilities of that which we can create together based on the best of who we are?

Implications for me. The 2000-2010 decade only ended three years before I began writing this manuscript. During the last three years I have enjoyed and explored the result of the past four decades’ process creations. My communication consulting practice has been fruitful and fulfilling. For me, the learnings of the naughty decade have focused primarily around the significance of process design and the social construction of safe environments where people can create their preferred futures. With those priorities in mind, I choose to explore entry into a

doctorate program and compile these learnings to hopefully form a set of updates to my artisan toolkit.

Chapter Four: Reflections

Those who criticize autoethnographies usually support traditional social science methods that emphasize truth, validity, and fact-finding. Seen as biased, autoethnographic writing seems to traditional social science researchers as too self-absorbed (Denzin, 2000). But Denzin went further to recommend that if a narrative is to be so biased, it needs to contribute to positive social change and move us to action, in the manner of Ken Gergen's call for generative theory, which liberates us from the focus on fact and evidence (Gergen, 1978). Since autoethnographies emerged from social construction, I am confident that this narrative answers Denzin's call. In my approach, I construct myself in my writing as an academic and practitioner working within the context of a *communication consultant*. As Melanie James stated in her autoethnographic writing, "I present this autoethnography as an account of how I negotiated, not always successfully, the challenges of applying theory to practice and of moving between the academic and practitioner roles" (James, 2012). I take my 40-year reflection and use it to produce more stories that hopefully engage the reader all the way to the end of the manuscript, where I translate those stories into concepts, methods, and skills that can equip communication consultants, including myself, for the future. Using my biased stories and examples, I construct a new portion of an artisan's toolkit that enables third parties to assist others in creating their preferred future. In this chapter, I explore these reflections, followed by examples and cases that best summarize where this past has led. In summary, this chapter focuses on:

- Reflecting back on my professional and academic history, I note what has had personal significance. Each of the two resulting reflections are explored in some depth.
- Shifting forward, acknowledging actual experiences that allowed me to grasp these significant reflections. I explore two relevant cases.

Reflecting back, what has endured? What had significance? My answers are below.

1. I have followed (through my research and practice) the evolution of communication and conflict from:
 - resolution to mediation,
 - collaboration to dialogue
 - Listen-Acknowledge-Respond-Commit (LARC) model steps to effective transcendent communication
 - World of Difference orientation to the creation of better social worlds
2. I am committed to illuminating design thinking: engaging people in the design and creation of their preferred futures.

Reflection #1: The Evolution of Communication and Conflict Has Led to Development of the World of Difference orientation.

Scholars and practitioners who have addressed the role of communication in conflict situations have traveled a road from the transmission model to the World of Difference orientation. Domenici and Littlejohn (2001) offer a description of that journey with mediation being one marker on the journey. Another marker is dialogue. My autoethnographic journey offers the World of Difference orientation as the most recent marker that leads me to construct my artisan toolkit for the next part of my journey. The following is an exploration of that journey from communication and conflict to World of Difference. Markers on that journey are:

1. conflict management strategies;
2. dispute resolution methods;
3. choosing a dispute resolution strategy--from argument to dialogue;
4. LARC (Listen, Acknowledge, Respond, Commit); and

5. World of Difference orientation

Each of these markers will be presented as a resource that served practitioners and scholars of communication and conflict adequately for the time they were illuminated. I am identifying them as historical moves, within which I was involved for periods of time. They did serve as the basis of my personal preference for collaboration and eventually dialogue. I will not be commenting on the impact of these methods, strategies, and orientations on the facilitation of change, but will be offering them as important steps in the creation of the commitments I am making at this time with this writing. Each of the five “markers on my journey” will be introduced here and explored as a part of a group of focuses that built the infrastructure for collaboration, dialogue, and the World of Difference orientation. These were (and still are in many cases) shared in university courses in communication and conflict, including the courses I still teach.

Conflict management strategies. If we are aware that conflict can be constructive or destructive, depending on how we handle it or how we use communication tools, it is possible to see a variety of choices in how to manage conflict. Five strategies—avoidance, accommodation, competition, compromise, and collaboration—are common choices in dealing with conflict situations in daily life. It is important to examine these strategies, which are the backdrop for communication choices in the context of conflict. Then we have another set of choices when we choose how to we enact these choices in everyday life. In the 80s and 90s, these choices were often labeled as “disputes,” which illuminated another set of choice.

Avoidance. Individuals in conflict often decide to avoid the problem area altogether. They are unwilling or unable to face the situation, and they “vacate” physically, verbally, or nonverbally. This approach can be useful if the conflict is short-lived (someone’s sprinkler splashes water on you while jogging by) or minor (waitress refilled your water glass when you

said you'd had enough water). For other situations, the drawbacks to avoiding conflict are many: the conflict can escalate, the relationship most likely will not improve, there will still be an issue "stewing" inside the person, and that person passed up a chance to experience a learning opportunity that could be useful for future conflict. An example of avoidance occurs when a part-time employee avoids speaking up about an unhealthy working environment. He or she could avoid physically (quit the job without telling his or her boss why), verbally (continue answering queries about the working conditions by saying "everything is just fine"), or nonverbally (not say a word and continue to work). The most frequent outcome of avoidance is a perception of a winner and a loser—and a large power imbalance.

Accommodation. Accommodation can be detrimental if one person doesn't value the worth or importance of his/her own needs. If a husband always refuses invitations to attend hockey games despite being an avid fan because he thinks his wife will resent being home alone, he is being too accommodating. He is also reacting to a *perceived* conflict. If he doesn't discuss the issue, he may have attributed feelings to his wife that do not exist; that is, he may have misread the situation. Accommodating in this situation, and many others, may result in a win/lose situation. When an individual accommodates out of low self-confidence or lack of communication skills, that person is doing a disservice to him or herself.

Competition. Competitive approaches to conflict often involve highly assertive and even aggressive individuals who see conflict as a win/lose situation. One person, usually the more powerful, wins at the other's expense. Competition is a strategy that has its place in clearly defined situations. For example, in a negotiation over the sale of a used car, one party may be bargaining competitively and expects the other party to do the same or risk being perceived as weak or unskilled.

Unless both parties freely define a situation as requiring healthy competition, competitive approaches to conflict can provoke defensiveness in the other party. One person may feel that his or her needs are threatened and will shift the focus of the conflict away from the original issue to combat perceived threats, attacks, and comparisons. Defending oneself becomes the issue, and there is little chance of resolving the first disagreement. The power struggle that occurs in this situation can change a simple conflict into a multi-issue crisis. Two workers who began discussing the issue of “who gets to use the fax machine first” can find themselves in a battle over “who gets a better salary” and “who treats the customers better.”

Compromise. When two parties meet halfway in negotiation, both give up something they want or need and meet somewhere in the middle. Because individuals give up a part of their wants or needs, compromise is sometimes seen as a lose/lose situation. Compromise can be effective in a situation where you have a multifaceted issue and time is short. If two countries are negotiating about a cease-fire and they need an immediate decision, they may each strike three of their requests and agree on one. This approach can also be useful if both parties have tried collaborating and the negotiation has fallen apart. When these two countries have worked together for two months with no clear results, they may decide to compromise for the time being until a more appropriate negotiation situation can be arranged.

The disadvantage of this strategy is that both parties often leave the negotiation dissatisfied. It may have been mutually acceptable to end the negotiation this way, but it may not have been mutually acceptable to settle on the compromised terms.

Collaboration. The goal of a collaborative style of conflict management is to produce a win/win situation. Both parties are attempting to satisfy the needs and/or desires of each side. Collaboration requires a commitment from each side, a desire to work together and produce a

solution that is mutually acceptable. The first hurdle is to reach a mutually agreeable assessment of the issue to be confronted. Collaboration is most advantageous to people who want to preserve an ongoing relationship—whether spouses, employee-employer, neighbors, or office mates. Collaboration allows parties to experience creative and constructive problem solving, which can be an opportunity to prevent the next conflict. Consider the situation where a landlord wants to raise the rent to pay for building upkeep, and the tenant is unable to pay more. A collaborative negotiation could result in the landlord deciding not to raise the rent, as the tenant (a carpenter) agrees to help paint and repair.

Use of collaboration may be risky in some cases, as in the case of the negotiator who initiates with collaboration and then switches to competition. Occasionally, a party may seem to be “working with” the other party on a complicated issue. In the end, it is evident that the first party was merely using collaboration to gather information to gain power to “go for the big win.” Collaborative approaches to conflict management are often win/win situations. Parties work to explore options to resolution that can satisfy both of them. A mutually acceptable, collaborative resolution is usually not a spectacular one for either party but is reasonable, workable, and satisfying.

Dispute resolution methods. Society has worked out many ways to resolve specific conflicts in people’s lives, which are often labeled as their “disputes.” Some of these disputes concentrate almost exclusively on settlement, but we will find that there are other forms which concentrate more on creating empowerment and constructive relationships.

Direct methods. The most common form of conflict resolution is negotiation. Here parties try to work through their differences without the help of a third party. Often negotiation is done through representatives. For example, a union steward may negotiate on behalf of an employee,

a parent may negotiate on behalf of a child, or a real estate agent may negotiate on behalf of a homebuyer or seller. These are all examples of *representative negotiation*.

We do not always rely on representatives to negotiate for us. Actually, *personal negotiation* is probably the most frequently used form of conflict resolution. Married couples constantly negotiate with one another. Co-workers make decisions about workplace issues. Neighbors negotiate about all sorts of issues. Children are constantly negotiating. We negotiate when we buy a car. In these cases, we rely on our personal skills and relationships rather than those of a representative to see us through the process.

Any time two parties engage in discussion attempting to reach an agreement, they are using personal negotiation. Personal negotiation allows maximum empowerment of the disputing parties, as they have complete control of the situation. At the same time, however, they may or may negotiate in good faith, and the outcome may or may not be mutually acceptable. Achieving good faith negotiated agreement is often difficult. Indeed, a dispute may be of such magnitude or so threatening that at least one of the parties will seek the assistance of a lawyer or other representative. Negotiators may also seek the help of an outside facilitator.

Facilitated methods. For a variety of reasons, the parties to dispute may seek the assistance of an outside party, often when a stalemate has been reached. Actually, there are probably many types of third-party intervention. We may seek the help of a mutual friend, a counselor, minister, or supervisor. On a more formal level, there are two general worlds of conflict intervention—settlement facilitation and mediation.

Settlement facilitation is a process in which a third party works exclusively to achieve an agreement between the disputants. Although it can be used in a variety of venues such as labor-management relations, settlement facilitation is most commonly seen as part of the legal system.

The attorneys themselves can take the initiative to hire a settlement facilitator, or the court may order them to do so. In some cases the court actually appoints the settlement facilitator. Most settlement facilitators are attorneys, judges, or retired judges.

Once an acceptable facilitator is selected, he or she will meet with the parties. The facilitator typically shuttles back and forth between the parties, helping each weigh alternatives, formulate offers and demands, and craft proposals. The facilitator maintains very strong control of the process, often makes judgments about the respective cases of the two sides, and frequently makes settlement suggestions. This person may also tell the parties what he or she thinks will be won or lost in court if a settlement is not reached.

The clear goal of a settlement facilitator is to get an agreement, settle the case, and clear the suit out of the court system. Consequently, there is a great deal of pressure in most settlement facilitations for the parties to agree. Normally, legal considerations dominate the work of settlement facilitation, and facilitators are usually unconcerned with relational issues.

The second general type of intervention is *mediation*. Mediation occurs when a neutral third party facilitates a conversation in which disputants share their stories, discuss their differences, identify areas of agreement, and test options with a possible outcome of a mutually acceptable resolution. Mediators focus on relational issues as well as specific content issues and encourage the parties to create their own solutions within the problem areas. Often two mediators work as a team.

The parties in this process are in control of the information and issues discussed while the mediator keeps an eye on the process. Indeed, mediators are often called “process facilitators” or “process managers” because they suggest flexible rules for the process. At the same time, they work collaboratively with the disputants to establish a process that is acceptable and workable

for those involved. In divorce mediation, for example, the parties may deal with division of property and custody settlement, as well as relationship problems that need to be resolved. In a workplace situation, two employees may mediate concerning long-distance telephone calls and communication styles when discussing workplace issues.

Adjudicative methods. Adjudication is a process in which an authority makes a decision between two or cases based on argumentation. Representatives, usually attorneys, present arguments supporting their respective cases, and the authority decide. The two most common forms of adjudication in our society are arbitration and trial.

Arbitration is a privately arranged process in which an arbitrator (or panel of arbitrators) listens to arguments, reads submitted materials, and makes a determination in favor of one side or the other. Arbitration is usually stipulated in some sort of contract between the parties. The arbitration clause of a contract will normally indicate whether the arbitration is to be binding or non-binding. Arbitration clauses are found in many real estate contracts, labor-management agreements, and employment contracts.

Trial, of course, is the ultimate settlement forum within the legal system, and depending upon the court and the type of case, the decision may be rendered by a judge or a jury. There are several differences between arbitration and trial. Arbitration is usually privately arranged and governed by private contract; trials are part of the public legal system. Arbitrators are private practitioners who may or may not have a law degree and the experience of legal practice; judges are elected or appointed by elected officials and almost always have a legal background. Arbitration usually has less rigid rules of evidence than required in court trials. Finally, arbitration is usually (but not always) faster and less expensive than court.

There is no widely recognized method of dispute resolution that is adjudicative and also relationally oriented. I am challenged to imagine what such a form would look like. Perhaps the Navajo Peacemaker Court comes close. Here a dispute is brought to the Peacemaker, who is something like a judge. The Peacemaker will listen to the stories of the disputants, but with a special ear toward preserving the family, community, and culture of those involved. He will render a decision in the case, but the decision is usually designed to achieve peace, preserve relationships, and honor cultural tradition.

Choosing a dispute resolution strategy: from argument to dialogue. Disputing parties who are interested in selecting a third-party intervention must consider all available options. The following questions can help deal with that choice:

What goals do we have? Typical goals may be: (1) a quick, easy resolution of the problem, (2) preserving a relationship, (3) preventing problems from escalating. What issues do we want to deal with? Content? Relationship? Both? How formal of a process do we want to work with? (Do we want to sit comfortably on a sofa with a cup of tea or do we want to be afforded the formality of a courtroom or conference room?) How much power or control do we want over the process or the outcome? (Do we want to speak for ourselves or have someone speak for us?) What are the time, energy, and financial considerations?

When parties adhere to the view that conflict is negative, they rush into methods of resolution that enable them to “make it go away” or to “get it over quickly.” With a positive view of conflict, one that envisions constructive results, individuals can carefully choose a dispute resolution method that suits them and the conflict. These constructive results can fall into the definition of what we call dialogue. Unlike ordinary conversation or debate, dialogue is a form of communication that helps build capacity in systems to explore hopes and concerns in a way

that encourages mutual understanding and respect at times when differences can be difficult and challenging. Exploring dialogue and its role in the management of human difference is a central tenant in this dissertation journey. Some use dialogue as a “choice” when considering conflict management options, and some use dialogue as more of an “orientation” to others in our communication interaction. This chapter touches on dialogue as a commitment necessary for managing the complexities and nuances of human differences.

Dialogue is not just a set of techniques but a way of being with others. It is based on a commitment to view each person as unique and immeasurable. When engaged in dialogue, participants are open to the mystery of others, are curious about the experiences and thinking that have led to current positions, and come to appreciate the unique life journeys that affect their respective beliefs, attitudes, and experience. Dialogue does not preclude passionate disagreement, but provides opportunities in which differences are sites for exploration and growth. People who are able to talk and listen together in an environment of trust and respect help make better social worlds; they make better decisions, they make better organizations, and they make better communities.

Many things can happen in the dialogue process. Participants may gain insight into their own experiences and beliefs. They may learn how to say what is important to them in a way that others can hear it and discover new important differences as well as shared concerns. Typically, participants learn important new things and come to realize that issues are more complex than previously thought. Dialogue sometimes leads to action. While dialogue is a worthy end in itself, participants may be moved to act as a result.

As this section concludes its brief exploration of the “markers”, negotiation, settlement facilitation, arbitration, and trial—we note they are often dominated by argument. Each side

presents a case, including positions and claims along with supporting evidence. Influence is usually the clear objective as each side tries to persuade one another or a third party of the validity of its position. Although compromise may be an important ingredient, the initial tendency is to debate the issues.

Some other methods (markers), personal negotiation and mediation—may include a good dose of argument, but another kind of communication is preferred—dialogue. At their best, negotiation and mediation involve a different set of goals. Once the parties realize that they are probably not going to get the other side to give in, they may deal with one another in a new way. Mediators are uniquely suited to help the disputants achieve dialogue.

In general, dialogue is a process of being clear about one's own perspectives, feelings, and ideas, but also being open to understanding and respecting that of others. As a result, listening is an important part of dialogue. Table 1 lists some important differences between argument and dialogue. The principles of dialogue outlined here are ideals for mediation and any choices people make about how to address conflict.

Table 1: Argument and dialogue. Adapted from the Public Conversations Project (Domenici & Littlejohn 2001, p. 29).

Argument	Dialogue
In an argument, we try to win.	In a dialogue, we try to understand.
In arguments, we compete for speaking time.	In dialogues, listening is as important as speaking.
In arguments, we often speak for others.	In dialogues, we speak mostly for ourselves.
In arguments, we bring up the behavior of others.	In dialogues, we speak from personal experience.
The atmosphere of an argument is often threatening and uncomfortable.	The atmosphere of a dialogue is one of safety.
In arguments, we tend to take sides with others.	In dialogues, we discover differences even among those with whom we agree.
In arguments, we polarize ourselves from those with whom we disagree.	In dialogues, we discover shared concerns between ourselves and others.
In arguments, we feel unswerving commitment to a point of view.	In dialogues, we discover our uncertainties as well as deeply held beliefs.
In arguments, questions are asked to make	In dialogues, questions are asked out of true

a point or put the other person down.	curiosity and the desire to know more.
In arguments, statements are predictable.	In dialogues, we discover significant new things.
In arguments, our statements tend to be simplistic.	In dialogues, we explore the complexity of the issues being discussed.
Arguments tend to be competitive.	Dialogues tend to be collaborative

The LARC resource. So, how do we talk when we are committed to dialogue? In my collaboration with Stephen Littlejohn, we committed to periodically reflect back on our practice and highlight what we have learned. One such learning resulted in the creation of a simple moniker to assist people in dialogic communication. We saw that communication worked so well when people acknowledged the other before responding. We put that insight into a suggested communication flow and called it the LARC resource (Listen, Acknowledge, Respond, Commit). We created the LARC resource as a way to communicate with the intention to create better social worlds by a focus on dialogue rather than argument. The following description of the LARC resource is offered in *Facework: Bridging Theory and Practice* (Domenici & Littlejohn, 2006).

Listening. Effective listening is more than just tuning in to hear the other. Good active listening is an ongoing process of actively focusing on the communication and attempting to understand. If we are to honor individuals and communities and systems by building effective relationships, we need to listen *first* before acknowledging, responding, or committing to next steps. The old saying goes, “There is always someone who knows better than you what you meant by your message.” The message we intend to get across is not always the one that is received. Listening requires a vigilance, practice, and responsibility. We offer three tips for this type of effective listening.

1. Delay judgment. Wait until you have more clarity on the intended message before you begin any further interaction. This clarification could come in the form of more questions, more patient listening, or more affirming nonverbal indicators.

- *Open ended questions* allow you to gain more information rather than one word answers.

Tell me more about.... How are you able to accomplish that? ... What makes you so interested in that subject? ...

- *Nonverbal indicators* include nodding your head, using focused and natural eye contact, offering an occasional ah-ha affirmation, and leaning forward toward the person.

2. Attend to the whole meaning. A message has many parts, including feelings, experiences, opinions, facts, ideas, and questions. You can sort out what you are hearing and look for assumptions and information for which you would like clarification.

3. Ask questions to clarify. To further understand and organize what you are hearing, it is important to remember that questions are a significant form of listening. You can help develop a climate of shared understanding by asking: Can you talk through that point again? I want to make sure I am clear what you are getting at. We have especially appreciated the work of Stewart and Thomas (1990) who offer skills for what they call “dialogic listening.” This is a process of “sculpting meaning” from diverse ideas and interactions. Through communication, we are able to sculpt and chip away at the pieces until we have a shared meaning. They offer four distinct pieces to this type of listening:

1. It focuses on *ours*. Rather than say that this idea or interest is yours, or mine, we can say *these are our interests, and this is our meaning*. When listening, you might say, “I think we are reaching shared understanding on the significance of this issue.”

2. It is *open-ended and playful*. Encourage creativity with our questions and comments. Encourage the other person to expand on ideas, identify more possibilities, and think deeper about the issues at hand.
3. It centers on ideas and issues *in front of* others, not what is behind the responses. Try not to psychoanalyze the comments of others. Break down ambiguity with clear questions and clear language so the idea become clearer to everyone, and does not contain hidden meanings.
4. It deals in the *present*, rather than in the past or future. Discussing the context of reference for comments can be used to explain the current statement. We want people to own their perceptions and opinions.

As you can imagine, listening to establish positive communication environments is active and interactive. The listener needs to be intensively involved in the interaction. As we continue to develop the trusting relationship, it is important to put off our instinct to jump in and give our own opinions and advice. We add an important step in the interaction.

Acknowledging. We want people to know that they are being heard. We want to acknowledge that we are sculpting meaning, or creating shared understanding. An acknowledgement is a statement that offers your understanding of what you heard. Let's say you are having a conversation with your friend about her wedding. She has just told you a long list of things she wants to make sure happen on that special day. It is your turn in the conversation and you could acknowledge what you heard, with one of the following forms of acknowledgements:

- Restate the content of what others say. *So, you want a church wedding, with four bridesmaids, a dance and reception afterward, and a huge cake. Is that right?*

- Reflect the feelings shown by others. *It sounds like you feel very strongly about making this day memorable for everyone.*
- Identify interests, goals, values, and needs. *I hear you saying that you need a party-like atmosphere so everyone will feel that the marriage is a really joyous thing. Am I correct?*
- Reframe comments in a constructive way. *You only want guests who love you and value your feelings, so you would rather not have any relatives who you have not seen lately.*
- Acknowledge positive, respectful interaction. *You have just talked through a difficult list of issues that need to be dealt with in a clear and gracious manner.*
- Summarize what has been said or achieved. *You have just reviewed your entire set of wedding plans. You want a fairly traditional wedding and you want to have lots of fun!*

The important thing to remember when making an acknowledgement statement is that you should always be tentative. You are telling them what you heard them say, and want to make sure you have interpreted it correctly. Try to end your statements with something like: *Did I get that right? Am I hearing you correctly? Is that what you meant? Am I following what you are trying to tell me? OK?* If the speaker corrects you and says, “No, what I really meant is this,” then you will need to go ahead and start all over with the listening and responding cycle until you do reach some shared meaning on what the speaker is saying. After you have reached that shared understanding, you can allow yourself to respond.

Responding. This is the time for your statement, your own comments, your perspective or opinions, or your advice. In a high quality communication environment, this is another opportunity to communicate in a way that keeps people feeling comfortable and respected. We probably all know what it feels like to hear a comment that cuts deep, offends us, makes us

uncomfortable or makes us defensive. You want to respond in a way that keeps people engaged in the conversation. These suggestions for responses can keep the conversation going.

- State your own interests, goals, values, and needs. *I need to understand just what is expected of me for this wedding. I do not have much money for fancy clothes or celebrations.*
- Discover mutual or differing interests, goals, values, and needs. *I can see that we have a difference of opinion about these wedding plans. I think it is important to know each other a long time before making a marriage commitment, and I gather that you are more interested in getting started in building the lifelong commitment as soon as possible.*
- Frame issues and options. *It looks to me like we need to get more information about a variety of things, including the price of the wedding that you would like, and the interests of your fiancé in the wedding plans.*
- Discuss implications for relationship. *I am concerned that this wedding will take over all our time in the next six months, and our friendship will suffer.*

A response that is face-threatening can destroy a conversation or a relationship. Take a look at the difference between these two responses: 1) *Your plans are usually so inappropriate and impossible to achieve. When are you going to get real?* 2) *I am concerned that the plans you are speaking about could be difficult to achieve.* We like to remind people to frame their responses as an “I” statement rather than a question or accusation. Here is a simple sequence to use when putting together a response that honors relationships and personal identity (Scholtes, Joiner, & Streibel, 2003):

1. *Describe what you are reacting to.* Describe the behavior or issue without judgment, exaggeration, labeling or attribution.
2. *Tell how the suggestion or idea or behavior affects you.* Does it make you frustrated? Annoyed? Angry? Confused? Happy?
3. *Say why you are affected that way.* Describe the connection between what you heard and the feelings they provoke in you.
4. *Describe the change or idea you would like considered.* If you would like to see things change or would like someone to see your viewpoint, you can state it in a way that connects to the issue and its affect on you.
5. *Why you think the change will alleviate the problem.* Here is where you give the reasons for your suggestion.
6. *Listen to the other person's response.* Remembering that you are sculpting meaning together and always be prepared to discuss options and come up with a path forward collectively.

Here is what an “I statement” might look like in the wedding conversation between two friends.

I hear some very optimistic wedding planning going on. When I hear such confident planning about such an ambitious undertaking, I feel quite nervous because I would hate to see you let down again. It would be nice to bring in some other people who would be affected by these plans and include them in the discussion. They could give us some realistic insights into the logistics of a wedding such as this. What do you think of that suggestion?

People are more likely to remain open to the response if it is framed in a way that honors them, while still bringing the issues into the open appropriately. A communication interaction that has cycled through times of active listening, acknowledgements that signal a commitment to shared understanding, responses that keep all communicators engaged, and build in ample time to make commitments, creates better social worlds.

Committing. It is a good rule of thumb to bring some closure to our interactions, so we can honor the accomplishments and contributions that have occurred thus far. This step may just be a marker, a temporary commitment to continue the conversation, or it may be a firm commitment to next steps or to a collaborative decision. Whether it is two people in an informal conversation or a multitude of people having a system wide conversation save time to discuss what will happen next as a result of the interaction. We suggest the following types of commitments (Littlejohn & Domenici, 2001, p. 113-117).

- *Decide on an appropriate course of action.* How frustrating it is to leave a meeting and see people shaking their heads saying, “We talked a lot but nothing was accomplished.” If there is an issue in question, one commitment that could be taken is for the communicators to make a decision or determine the appropriate next steps. This commitment could occur quickly, “It looks like we have agreed to invite the mayor to our next meeting” or more deliberate, “We will now undertake an intensive assessment of our community, starting with an interview of the mayor and the police chief.” When a decision is made, it is helpful to (1) reality test the solution by discussing how this solution will work, who will do it, when will it get done, and where the resources will come from; or (2) if the decision falls apart, be ready to revert to LARC model: Listen, Acknowledge, Respond, Commit.

- *Create a constructive environment for discussion.* We call this a process commitment. Here is where the communicators decide to create a deliberate process for discussing the topic. Considerations would be given to the interactional accomplishments offered above: collaborative communication, safe environment, process management, and power management. “We will hold a separate meeting to discuss this one issue that divides us. We need to decide where, when, and how long to meet. Who will facilitate? Who will set the agenda? How will we make sure everyone’s concerns are heard? Who will take notes? What will we do if we continue to disagree?”
- *Explore the issue further.* This commitment is only feasible if there is still time and resources to continue the conversation at hand. Sometimes, a group may say, “It is almost lunchtime, how about if we keep on discussing this through lunch?” What is vital here is that people decide together if they are going to keep on talking together, even past their stated time limit. It is so frustrating when a conversation continues on and on with the assumption that everyone has the time and energy to stay engaged. We want people to *choose* the type of interaction they embark on and continue with. Take a process check (or “time out”) and query the group about their comfort level and dedication to the issue at hand before exploring it further at the current time.
- *Use collaborative problem solving.* This type of commitment says that all communicators will work together to address the issue at hand. We use this type of commitment step especially when we are addressing deep differences or face threatened environments. We can use a process where all participants work together to create a mutually beneficial solution. Typical collaborative problem solving looks like this:

1. Define the problem as a shared problem. Make sure everyone sees the problem the same way.
2. Discuss goals. What do the different people want, and what should the group as a whole achieve?
3. Brainstorm possible solutions. List solutions that will meet as many goals as possible.
4. Try to achieve consensus on what will make a good solution. Keep in mind that you are going to try to meet as many of the participants' goals as possible.
5. Narrow the choices to a few realistic options.
6. Deliberate on the pros and cons of each option, and discuss the trade-offs you would be willing to make. Weigh each option against the goals and criteria.
7. Make a tentative decision.
8. Reality test the decision.
9. Discuss how to put the decision into action.

Bring in a third party to facilitate or mediate the issue or conflict. The benefits of using an objective third party to help guide the communication are numerous. It is most helpful if this person has skills in communication facilitation, mediation, or group processes. Maybe this person is another member of a similar group who has dealt with an associated issue. In some cases, the outside person can be hired as a consultant to assist with process management. In either case, this commitment shows dedication to building an atmosphere of understanding and respect. Sometimes we hear of people who feel that bringing in an outside person signals defeat. They could not handle their issues on their own. We feel quite differently. A commitment to a

respectful and face honoring environment is seen clearly when outside resources are brought in to assure that high quality communication occurs.

These LARC skills are a starting place to enable people to communicate with one another in ways that respect the dignity and contributions of everyone. We try to model these skills in an organic and dynamic manner. Even though they are presented in a linear way (listen first, then acknowledge, then respond, and finally commit) we know that our interactional accomplishments are a complex weave of communication.

In this chapter thus far, I have illuminated my some of the focuses, or the “markers” that I encountered as communication choices on the journey addressing:

1. conflict management strategies;
2. dispute resolution methods;
3. choosing a dispute resolution strategy--from argument to dialogue;
4. LARC (Listen, Acknowledge, Respond, Commit)

My travels on that road led myself and Stephen Littlejohn to develop the World of Difference orientation as a transcendent means of communication in the search for better social worlds.

These first four markers ended up being a significant part of the structure that provided fertile ground for the development of the next marker, the communication orientation that will end up shaping my final commitment in this dissertation. The shift now to explore the World of Difference orientation will be a significant one. With the development of this orientation, we minimized use of limiting words such as *conflict* and *resolution* and began to wonder what kind of worlds could be created if we acknowledged human differences abound and can be managed in ways that enable our preferred futures.

World of Difference orientation. Human beings understand their experiences within a context of symbols and meanings created over time through social interaction. Each of us lives within numerous realities formed in communication and reflected in language and other expressive forms. Each person is the unique nexus of the social worlds in which he or she has participated.

The human condition, then, is characterized by human differences, and quality of life is largely determined by the quality of communication involved in managing the differences that matter the most. Within the life of an individual at any given moment, some differences are irrelevant, some are valuable, some are challenging, and some may be harmful, depending upon how we manage them at the moment. The goal of dialogue is to communicate in ways that have the potential to move away from harm and toward value. The world of human differences can be described in terms of four spheres, areas of life commonly encountered and managed. The first of these is the *sphere of irrelevance* where differences are solo or unified and do not seem to matter. In the *sphere of value*, communicators see differences as a positive resource. The *sphere of challenge* is not necessarily negative. Differences can still be viewed as valuable, but they often bring frustration, even exasperation, and people begin to act in ways that are harmful to all or some of the parties involved. At this point, communicators enter the *sphere of harm*, where violence or even war can erupt. Human difference spans the spheres of harm, challenge, and value.

MOVING FROM HARM TOWARD VALUE

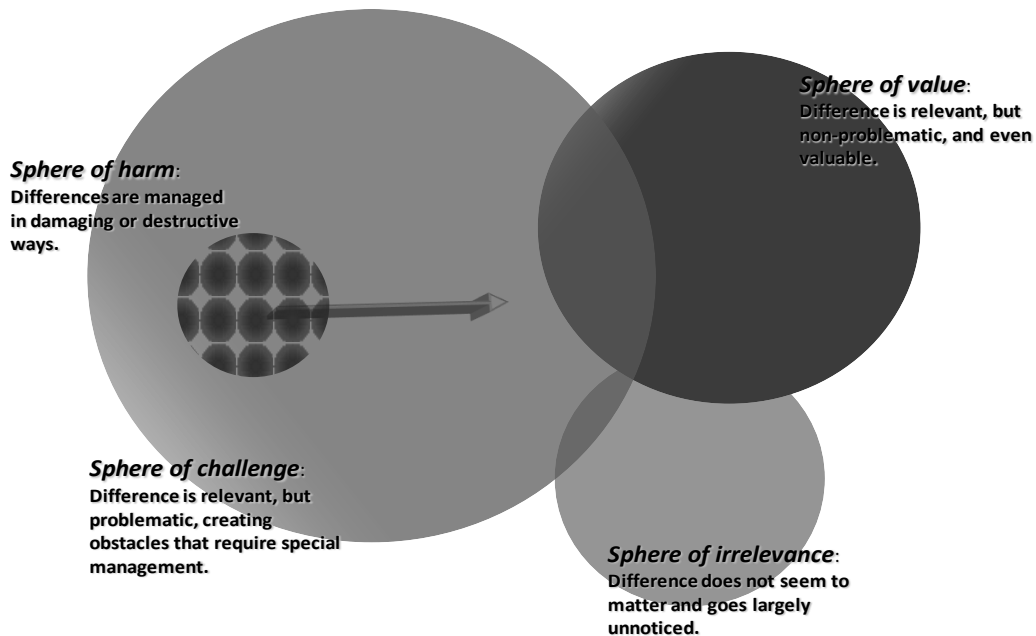


Figure 1: World of Difference orientation (Littlejohn & Domenici 2007)

As described in Chapter 3, in the section exploring the 2000s decade, the World of Difference orientation (Littlejohn & Domenici 2007) invites second-order change when moving from spheres of challenge or harm toward value. Instead of trying to resolve conflict, we can communicate in ways that transform it. Processes of domination and negotiation typically aim for *first-order change*. By this we mean that differences are managed as participants come to change their resources and practices—how they think and what they do.

Processes of transformation, in contrast, create conditions for *second-order change*, or a shift in how we define the relationships among the parties or the system in which the conflict is

occurring. Participants may not change their opinions on the issues they face, but they do change how they view themselves, others, and the community itself.

Transformative processes have several characteristics.

- *They create categories* that transcend differences among the parties by encouraging participants to find joining places, shared concerns, and mutual goals.
- *They shift the discussion* from persuasion, influence, and bargaining to listening, understanding, and respect.
- *They create a forum* in which all participants can learn significant new things about themselves and other people and to develop fresh ways of understanding the situation itself.
- *They encourage* participants to learn how each participant is a complex, fully formed individual with a history, values, and good intentions.
- *They allow difference* to stand without resolution. Intelligent, well meaning people can and should disagree, and that's okay.
- *They set the stage* for collaborative work in the future.

The evaluation of communication and its role in managing human conflict has found a stable structure in this model of second-order change. Rather than focusing on right/wrong, guilt/innocence, or you/me, the individuals, groups or communities experiencing difference can communicate in a way that shifts their relationships into the sphere of value. Communication choices such as collaboration, dialogue, and LARC enable second-order change possibilities.

My first reflection for this dissertation has highlighted some of the evolution which led to the World of Difference orientation. I did not intend to point out inadequacies of any communication and conflict strategy choices, but did intend to show that they were important

focuses for their time, and provided the backdrop to move from “resolving human conflicts and disputes” to “managing human differences.” If we are to embark on initiatives, projects, actions, discussions, and meetings in order to manage those differences, my second reflection offers some of the upfront work of design thinking necessary to create the process of communication. We just don’t fall into dialogue and collaboration. We don’t easily use LARC when having staff meetings and dialogue about border control. Ideally, we make conscious choices about *how* to talk with each other to achieve our common goals. This conscious choice-making is the bedrock of my second reflection.

Reflection #2: Engaging Humans in the Creation of Their Preferred Future Works Well When Those Who Will Be Involved in the Future Take Part in the Design of the Creation Process.

For multiple years, when I began to work with a complex group or system in hopes of assisting them in creating change, I noticed a way of working that ensured more ownership and commitment of the change process (and its results). I would not just involve them in a process that I created to enable them to communicate and create those changes, but I would involve them in the *design* of those processes. Many theorists and practitioners call this “design thinking.” My use of design began long before those terms became popular, so I will spend some time in this chapter exploring some recent thoughts about design thinking, followed by some of my own work examples. To begin, I will explore: Who is using (and claiming to use) design thinking?

Eric Schmidt is the executive chairman of Google. He often discusses Google’s great success as based on the “emergent innovations” that Google’s creative engineers produce. How do they produce? He sees that “the most remarkable technological innovations occur where small teams of people are free to explore the outer limits of their imagination” (Austin & Devin,

2003, p. xvii). At Google, they call these small teams who are charged with creating collaborative art “Googlets”, unexpected innovations that are exciting and often profitable. Rob Austin and Lee Devin (2003) wrote a brilliant book called *Artful Making: What Managers Need to Know About How Artists Work*. They coined the term “artful making” as a process for creating form out of disorganized materials (2003, p. xxv). This process differs from industrial making (design), which is characterized by detailed planning, tightly specified objectives and processes. Of course, these two are not mutually exclusive, but the authors do predict that business processes are becoming more like art.

One differentiation for artful making is the difference between a failure and a mistake. IDEO, a leading global design firm, based in Palo Alto, California, appreciates failure because it generates useful information. A failure that does not produce useful information is called a mistake (Kelley, 2001).

An important commitment in artful making explored in numerous successful enterprises is the importance of embracing uncertainty rather than protecting against it (Austin & Devin, 2003). To embrace uncertainty, organizations need to build their capacity to improvise, to incorporate the unexpected into new and valuable outcomes.

These design thinking examples illuminate the appreciative view of the human potential. When we believe that humans have the capacity to design the process to create their future, individuals and organizations would value engagement and collaboration. Frank Barrett invites us to hold this value in his book *Yes to the Mess: Surprising Leadership Lessons from Jazz* (2012). Barrett offers insight into how jazz improvisation is a model for our design thinking commitments. These seven principles became a part of my reflection for this dissertation and the resulting design thinking commitment. For each of these principles, I offer a typical question I

ask clients in my consulting work, which may lead them to consider the principle (questions adapted from the Public Conversation Project).

1. *Mastering the art of unlearning.* Jazz musicians unlearn by deliberately disrupting routine. Routine can be seductive but often hinders being open to new possibilities. *What conversation, if begun today, could ripple out in a way that created new possibilities for the future (or our situation)?* With the focus on “new” possibilities, people can imagine futures that are not among the usual or habitual activities.
2. *Developing affirmative competence.* Even when we are confused or uncertain, it is possible to believe that there exists a solution or a path forward from our situation. Saying “yes” signals that affirmative belief. *If our success were completely guaranteed, what bold steps might we choose?* Rather than the focus on what is not possible, this type of “yes thinking” says that we can imagine success and that imagining has power in it. Holding that confirmatory view will give us the freedom to move forward into futures never before imagined.
3. *Perform and experiment simultaneously.* A culture that privileges design thinking will know that failures are occasions for learning. *What assumptions about failure do we need to test or challenge in thinking about this situation? And how might we transcend those assumptions to move forward?* Sometimes it is helpful to identify assumptions we have about what makes our actions a failure. Briefly identifying and committing to surpassing those assumptions may move us from “failure thinking” to a knowledge that each moment is a time to learn about our next direction.
4. *Balance freedom and constraints.* Following hunches often leads to the possibilities that might be missed if we were weighted down with a lack of room for experimentation.

Freedom to try out our hunches can be balanced with a careful development of choice points. *What could happen that would enable you/us to feel fully engaged and energized in this situation?* We can have the freedom to follow our intuition and even be nudged in a direction within the context of some guidelines and even seeming limitations.

5. *Learn by doing and talking.* Relational engagement assists with both individual and institutional learning. Talking together produces good things. *How can we support each other in taking the next steps? What unique contribution can we each make?* Even when we may not agree on our common values or perspectives, we can do something together. Often it is in the doing where we learn of new common interests and values.
6. *Take turns soloing and supporting.* It is possible to support each other in the quest to allow everyone to do their best. Sometimes we offer our own unique viewpoint, and then allow others to do the same. This sounds like an easy idea, but it is usually difficult to organizationally develop. *What's emerging that you can take leadership on? What is emerging in others that you can support their leadership?* By defining leadership as collaborative endeavors, we know that we sometimes lead by working with others and supporting them.
7. *Leadership as provocative competence.* Design thinking calls for a type of leadership that disrupts routine and invites people to stretch themselves. Leaders model and ask for exploration of the unfamiliar. *What would someone who had a very different set of beliefs than we do say about this situation?* When leaders can ask themselves to consider other viewpoints, especially in front of those they lead, they model shared leadership and a request for others to do the same.

Many think that this appreciative view of human potential excludes a focus on efficiency. If we are busy sharing leadership, considering others, and creating room for innovation, we don't have time to do our real business. Roger Martin, Dean of the Rotman School of Management at the University of Toronto, studies design thinking and in "The Design of Business: Why Design Thinking Is the Next Competitive Edge," he finds that design thinking can capture both innovation and efficiency to create a powerful competitive edge (Martin, 2009). Businesses show this commitment to both by dedicating resources to innovation and building capacity into the organization culture.

Tackling innovation, especially with a goal to integrate design thinking into an organization or institution's culture, can face challenges. In this scenario, an organization is called to explore mystery. These roadblocks to implementing design thinking are offered by Martin (2009):

- 1) Declaring mysteries unsolvable. If an organization lets a mystery remain a mystery, they often just create coping mechanisms. These mechanisms are "nothing more than a clever way to blame a confusing environment for a company's inability to plan ahead (p. 76)."
- 2) Leave the thinking to the boss. An organization's tendency to leave design thinking in the hands of the highly paid executives, the specialists, or those with the finances and status invites defense mechanisms. The top dogs own the ideas, and that ownership can create polarization.
- 3) Mindless work continues, even though new innovations could save the time and money. Status quo organization structures (and loyalty to them) need to be examined periodically to be able to fund and find innovation.

Exploring mystery (using design thinking) can be expensive, time-consuming, and risky. When beginning the exploration, participants don't know yet what to leave out and can expect

false starts and hiccups in the exploration. The design thinker can successfully bridge the analytical and the creative, art and science, and address new opportunities never imagined.

I have looked at various definitions of design thinking and its cousins: artful making, artisans, innovators, etc. The word “design” has historical connotations from architecture, fashion, and graphics. The field of communication and social construction has taken the word in a new direction. The following are examples of the evolution of design and the three bridges these definitions offer. I use these definitions and the examples above to offer my own definition and conceptual basis for design thinking.

Flusser and Cullars (1995): The bridge between hard and soft. To design is to take unshaped material and bring it into form that is visible. In contemporary discourse, design is the bridge between the hard, quantifiable, scientific activities and the soft, qualitative, aesthetic. This bridge between hard and soft creates a new culture that features both art and technology.

Terzidis (2007): The bridge between past and future. Design is a conceptual activity involving formulating an idea intended to be expressed in a visible form and carried out into action. This definition invites a paradox, because as designers step into the future searching for new innovation they must utilize ideas from the past in some way. This bridge between past and future inquires about the “idea” or “truth,” and whether designing is searching for that truth or truly discovering a new innovation.

Aakhus (2007): The bridge between communication theory and practice. Design is an activity of transforming something given into something preferred through intervention and invention. The bridge between communication as an object of focus and a process to create intervention reflects the theory/practice tension that is illustrated in social construction today.

Design is both a way to understand communication and an approach for investigating the social world from the standpoint of communication.

Isaacson (2013): Design is the co-construction of human social interaction intended to produce preferred futures.

In designing processes for change, I offer the following considerations developed over a couple decades of design work with clients in collaboration with Stephen Littlejohn.

Design considerations. Process design is always important and can be both enlightening and engaging. Process design addresses these questions:

1. What do we hope to accomplish?
2. What kind of dialogue would work best for us?
3. Who should be involved in this dialogue?
4. How should the process be conducted?

Process design should aim to achieve three goals:

1. *Preventing destructive communication:* Preventive processes are actions that minimize the possibility of destructive communication. Fully informed and voluntary participation in a communication process is helpful. Preventive approaches are used during communication and planning sessions as well as before them. Agreement to participate is based on an understanding of the nature of the event, the kind of ground rules or guidelines that will be proposed, and a willingness to participate.
2. *Encouraging constructive communication:* Once the discussion is underway, several processes help to promote good dialogue. Facilitators help the group design and guide its own process. They enforce the ground rules to maintain a safe, respectful environment. They intervene as necessary to make sure that everyone has a chance to say what they

want to say, to keep the group on track, and to sort out possible misunderstandings. They ask questions that create openings for new kinds of interaction.

3. *Building collaboration*: Good communication always includes a collaborative element. Participants are viewed as collaborators in a joint effort to create a constructive conversation. In addition, they provide feedback that can guide future improvement.

Following are criteria that can be used in addressing these goals:

1. *transparency*—clear, open, and respectful communication
2. *inclusion*—multi-stakeholder engagement
3. *inquiry*—joint discovery and invention instead of pre-determined answers
4. *curiosity*—thinking provisionally, experimenting with ideas, and promoting creativity
5. *transcendence*—being open to new possibilities, surpassing polarities
6. *force for the future thinking*—The highest level of thinking in which stakeholder ideas and interests combine synergistically to create a wholly new and unanticipated future that can benefit everyone.

In this Chapter, I have introduced and explored my two reflections that will allow me to further create my future toolkit of thinking, working, and being in the world as a human communicator. I have journeyed through the world of communication and conflict, noting the evolution of “results-based resolutions and conflict solving” to “managing human differences as a way of living.” My first reflection allowed me to commit more fully to the World of Difference orientation.

My second reflection has given me fresh courage to engage with others in the *design* of the communication processes within which they will be participating, in order to have ownership and commitment of both the process and the outcomes. Design thinking will figure prominently in

my work with clients who in the past relied on me to develop the process and *give it to them*. Now I can engage them earlier, asking *how would you like to work together in order to create your preferred future?* This next section of the Chapter will offer examples of these reflections which figured prominently in my autoethnographic research and writing. These examples highlight where I looked to see the impact of World of Difference orientation and Design Thinking.

Shifting forward: What Did I Experience That Has Promise to Grasp the Learnings from These Reflections and Build My Toolkit to Move Forward?

As I investigated the examples in my practice that allowed me to form these reflections, I saw that the World of Difference was an orientation I held, spoke of, and implicitly modeled. Design Thinking was illustrated more explicitly. Engaging a “design team” to collaborate on process development and activities in order to create the process for change can provide stakeholders (those who have a “stake” or interest in the outcome) with a sense of ownership and commitment. In the remainder of this Chapter, I will explore three examples of design work which was collaborative work using World of Difference orientation: a university department, a religious organization requesting healing and visioning, and a community college. Within each example my two reflections—the World of Difference orientation and methods of engaging stakeholders in designing their own process—are apparent.

Example 1: university department. This example is from my work with a university department, where challenging communication and frustration was at an all-time high. They were having deep conflict around faculty hiring procedures and were feeling hurt from an unsuccessful hiring process that resulted in even deeper divisions. When I was asked to assist in addressing this conflict, my first request to the client was for them to form a design team with

whom I could work to create the process. I requested a small group of people (3-5), who represented department diversity and also had the time and commitment to collaborate with me on design. The department appointed a design team composed of three faculty members with differing views, and we began to collaborate on a design that would bring well-being to a frustrated educational department. After numerous design meetings, our design team embarked on a variety of activities. The following documents depict the resulting activities. Examples of these are provided, indicating the focus on design thinking and World of Difference in the University Department project (labeled as “Document 1” etc.):

1. General flow of the activities of the entire project.
2. Communication Guidelines that were used in all meetings
3. Agenda for the Faculty Retreat
4. Summary of Faculty Retreat outcomes
5. “Difficult Conversations” Agenda (student workshop)

Document 1: General Flow of the activities of the entire project

Note how the Design Team was a representative group who worked in creative ways with faculty to design the process. The faculty met in small groups (“Triads”) to identify themes or issues that needed further attention. These themes were organized by the Design Team for the retreat and other meetings.

1) <i>Triad</i> Faculty Lunches (<i>groups of three</i> faculty met for lunch)
2) Triads identify themes or focus areas that need attention in their Department
3) Design Team categorize themes and develop goal and agenda for a retreat
4) Design Team created a video, to be used in the retreat, illuminating a process retreat participants would be asked to experience.
5) All faculty attended a 2-day retreat
6) Outcomes of the retreat provided an agenda for follow-up activities
7) A private mediation was conducted over three months, to address one of the challenging focus areas
8) Leadership coaching occurred with the Dean of the Department, to assist in better communication based on retreat findings
9) A student workshop was convened, where retreat issues were further addressed, and students had a chance to demonstrate and role-play effective communication on diverse issues.

Document 2: Communication Guidelines that were used in all meetings

Note in these guidelines how people were encouraged to speak in a dialogic manner: owning their own perspectives and opinions while being profoundly open to the other. This is a way to manage human differences, without attempting to resolve conflicts.

We used the following communication guidelines for the retreat and subsequent meetings, which were adapted from the Public Conversations Project (Herzig and Chasin 2006).

Regarding the *spirit* of our speaking and listening:

- We will speak for ourselves and from our own experience.
- We will not criticize the views of other participants or attempt to persuade them.
- We will listen with resilience, “hanging in” when what is said is hard to hear.

Regarding the *form* of our speaking and listening:

- We will participate within the time frames suggested by the facilitator.
- We will not interrupt, except to indicate that we cannot hear a speaker.
- We will “pass” if we do not wish to speak.

Document 3: Agenda for the Faculty Retreat

Note how on the end of the first day participants are asked to continue to design the process by preparing topics for attention the next day.

Retreat Agenda

Friday

2:30 pm	Welcome and agenda preview
3:00 pm	Exploring dialogue and observing a demo
4:00 pm	Small group dialogue of 5-6 (*see “go-round” instructions)
5:00 pm	Harvesting <i>What surprised you? What interested you? What challenged you?</i>
6:00 pm	Planning to plan (Prepare topics for Saturday planning session)
6:30 pm	Reception and entertainment

Saturday

9:00 am	Parameters of the hiring situation (Presentation on complexities of hiring new faculty)
10:00 am	Go-round: What would you need to see, feel, or do, in order to move past the damage of the past, toward trust and toward creating a preferred future for all faculty?
11:00 am	Recommendations
Noon	Adjourn

Document 4: Retreat Outcomes

The following boxes illustrate the exercises and results that were used during the retreat, either designed by the Design Team or by the participants in the retreat. The first box depicts the private dialogue exercise.

Private Dialogue. On Friday afternoon, retreat participants experienced a unique method of dialogue called the “go-round” that consisted of three questions explored in four private small groups. Before the small groups met, we showed a role-play video (with the design team as actors) to demonstrate the type of communication we hoped for in the exercise. The small groups focused on the three questions below (no comments, responses, or cross-talk was allowed):

1. Is there something you’d be willing to share about your life experiences that might help others understand your thoughts and feelings about the school hiring?
2. What’s at the heart of the matter for you? What is most important to you about this issue?
3. Even people with strongly held positions and opinions have some uncertainties about their position. Please speak about any value conflicts, grey areas, dilemmas, or uncertainties you’ve experienced as you’ve thought about the school hiring issue.

Go-Round Instructions (used in the Friday afternoon dialogue exercise)

1. Review of suggested communication guidelines.
2. Introduce a “go-round.” The facilitator will ask the first question and after the first person responds, the order of speaking proceeds around the circle, in what is termed a “go-round.” If a person passes on the first time around, s/he is given another opportunity to speak after everyone else. There will be no responses, or comments. Each person speaks uninterrupted.

3. First Go-Round (3 minutes each) Is there something you'd be willing to share about your life *experiences* that might help others understand your thoughts and feelings about the issue?
4. Second Go-Round (2 minutes each) What's at the heart of the matter for you? (what is most important to you).

We followed these private dialogues with a large group facilitated discussion that evolved into identifying hiring process areas that needed attention and requests for further discussion of the damage and healing needed from the crisis earlier that year.

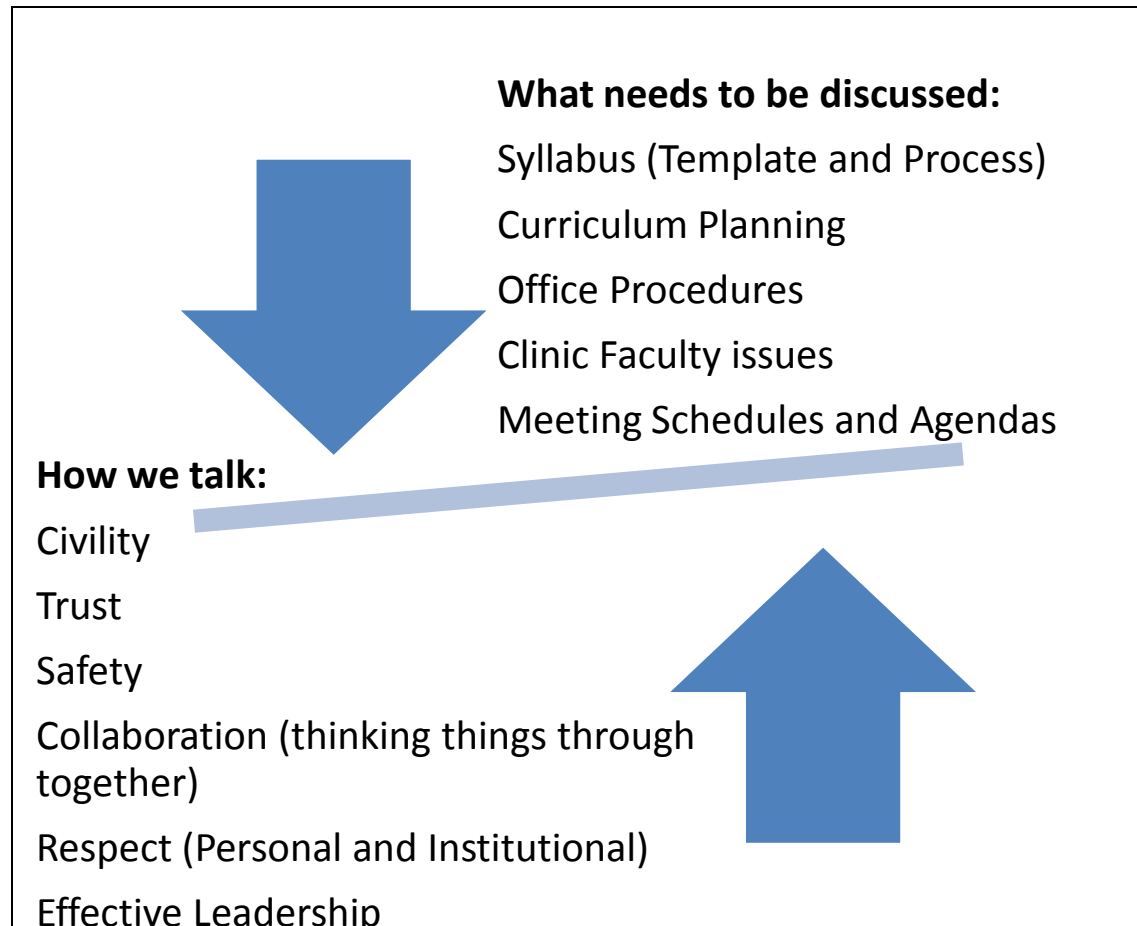
The group then respectfully addressed this question: *What would you need to see, feel, or do, in order to move past the damage of the past, toward trust and toward creating a preferred future?* This heartfelt and moving round of comments provided the basis for a final recommendation for consensus.

This dialogue is a new way to communicate about difficult issues, where people:

- share their personal experiences;
- learn new things about the complexity of the issue;
- discover important new things about each other; and
- build curiosity about each other and about the issue.

One outcome from the retreat was a clear identification of system tensions, as conveyed in Figure 2.

Figure 2: System Tension in our Department



Another outcome of the meetings was a set of suggestions for respectful communication and options for addressing civility.

Respectful communication:

1. acknowledge the context (“here’s the situation”);
2. state the issue/problem (“here is what we are dealing with”);
3. ask for collaboration (“what can we do to address this issue?”);
4. share personal suggestion (“here is what I think we should do”); and
5. set appropriate timelines and boundaries (“can you reply in a week?”).

We envisioned a student workshop as an activity to further address retreat outcomes. I put together the following proposal to begin discussing options with the design team.

Options for addressing civility

The following options can be offered alone, or in combination. Each will address ways to build respect, defuse polarization, build a context for collaboration, and create the capacity for communication that enhances a safe environment.

1. Workshop format: This option would be some type of half-day or full-day workshop. Topics may include:

- How to talk so others will listen and listen so others will talk
- Civil discourse (see attachment, for a sample)
- Dialogue
- Managing human differences (dealing with difficult communication)
- Cultural competency

2. Directly address issue: In this option, we could do some private small group mediations, which may or may not include observers, participant observers, reflections, and/or reporting back to the administration or a larger team of folks. If the actual people who were involved in the “note-passing” or the “male-female” conflicts are not available or interested to be involved, we could role-play them, with a strong debrief.

3. Facilitation training + “event”: We would organize a day or two of facilitation training that gets immediate hands-on experience with a larger “event” (difficult dialogues?) or (building civility?). It might go something like:

A.

- B. Four-hour facilitation training with a group of student/staff/faculty leaders or others who want to help create a safe environment + build skills.
- C. Two-4 hour large event, or meeting, or workshop where I give an overview of skills/methods for constructive communication, and then the newly trained facilitators work with small groups to address one of the pressing issues in school.
- D. Some type of follow-up or debrief or continued training with the facilitator team.

Document 4 depicts the agenda of the student “Difficult Conversations” workshop, which was designed by the faculty (began in the retreat and further developed by the Design Team).

Students were convened to explore their differences in new ways, without a search for the person or party who is right or wrong, or for which conflicts need to be resolved before moving forward in the creation of a fully functioning Department. LARC was introduced as a preferred way to communicate when human differences arise. Examples of dialogic questions were then explored, followed by strategies to transform negative talk into generative communication.

Document 4: “Difficult Conversations” Agenda

Difficult Conversations

Noon	Welcome and Introductions
12:10 pm	Presentation: Managing difficult conversations
12:25 pm	Demonstration
12:35 pm	Small groups practice
12:50 pm	Debrief
1:00 pm	Closing

LARC Model

Standing for LISTEN, ACKNOWLEDGE, RESPOND, and COMMIT, the LARC model is an approach to communication and conflict management in a group.

Step 1: Listen

- DELAY judgment.
- ATTEND to as much of the message as possible.
- ASK questions to clarify.

Step 2: Acknowledge

- RESTATE the content of what others say.
- REFLECT the feelings shown by others.
- IDENTIFY interests, goals, values, and needs.
- COMMEND positive contributions.
- REFRAME comments in constructive ways.
- SUMMARIZE what has been achieved.

Step 3: Respond

- STATE your own interests, goals, values, and needs.
- DISCOVER mutual or differing interests, goals, needs.
- FRAME issues and options.
- SUGGEST positive resources for change.
- DISCUSS team implications.

Step 4: Commit

- DECIDE on an appropriate course of action.
- CREATE a positive environment for discussion.
- EXPLORE the problem further.
- SOLVE the problem collaboratively.
- MEDIATE through a third party.

Good questions can encourage participants to move from argument to dialogue.

- Invite the parties to speak only for themselves.

Ron, you have been referring a lot to what the doctors want. I wonder how your personal view might differ from other members of the medical staff on this issue. What personal experiences of yours might be different from those of the other members of the family?

- Encourage parties to speak from personal experience.

Tim, what is it like to work in this office?

- Encourage parties to speak directly to one another.

Joanne, what would you like to ask Robert about where he stands right now? Could you ask him directly? And Robert I'm hoping you might take a few moments to answer her question the best you can.

- Invite a search for shared concerns.

People who disagree often have the same basic concerns. I want to take a few minutes to explore this possibility here. Could you each take a minute or two to talk about what you think your shared concerns might be?

- Ask parties to reveal their uncertainties, gray areas, dilemmas, and doubts.

We have spent quite a bit of time exploring your feelings about this issue, and it is clear that you feel strongly about it. I don't want us to forget those feelings, but for the moment, I would like to shift gears a little and ask each of you to think about your uncertainties and gray areas, you know, your doubts. What aspects of this issue are not so clear for you?

- Elicit parties' true curiosities, rather than posturings.

I would like to suggest a little session here that is sometimes helpful. I would like each of you to think about what the others have been saying and what you would like to ask them about.

Here's what's different. We're going to have a rule that you can't ask questions to make a point, but you have to ask questions out of true curiosity, to really understand more about where the other person is coming from. What do you think? Would you like to give this a try?

- Uncover complexities and help the parties become less polarized.

George, you have said that you are interested in keeping your full time job and working evenings and weekends to build your ceramics business. I wonder if you could talk a little more about how your week would go and what your schedule would look like with this plan.

- Elicit creative thinking rather than standard arguments.

Margaret, you have been really clear about the reasons you want a private office. I wonder if you have a few ideas about how the office as a whole might be arranged.

Strategies for helping to transform negative behavior into a more positive pattern:

Interruptions ~ Acknowledge the person's need to talk.

I can see you have strong feelings on this, Bob, and we'll get to you in just a moment.

In the meantime, I want to hear the rest of Jane's comment.

Non-participation ~ Acknowledge listening and invite comment.

Jim, I see you have been listening for a while, and I wonder what you are thinking about all of this.

Disruptive behavior ~ Address it as a group problem.

I notice we've been losing time by repeating things after people arrive. I wonder how we can make more efficient use of our time in this regard.

Side conversations ~ Talk to the offending individuals privately.

Betty, I've been distracted by your whispering in the back row. I'm sure it's nothing, but I just wanted to check with you to see if there is something I should know.

Offensive statements ~ Let the group handle them.

(A group member makes a racial slur. Pause for a moment to let it sink in, see if anyone comments, then move on. If the problem persists, ask the group if they would like a ground rule on respectful language.)

Hostility toward others ~ Reframe it and remind the group of the ground rules.

[upon hearing one participant call another a thief] I want to remind you about the groundrule of maintaining respectful language. We have to work together, so let's make it as easy as possible.

Loud, emotional argument ~ Interrupt, acknowledge, summarize, and take a break.

Just a minute, just a minute. Excuse me. I can see that Tom is very upset about Elizabeth's new accounting system, and Elizabeth you don't appreciate Tom's argument about it. I can see that both of you care about how records are kept, and I want to suggest that we look at that issue calmly. Let's take a break and get back to this situation when we get back.

Griping and whining ~ Acknowledge the caring, state the positive vision behind the person's complaint, and ask for a solution

I see you really care about making improvements here. I appreciate your vision for a really effective working environment, and I'm wondering what ideas you have for improving the situation.

Example # 2: religious institution facing differences about human sexuality. A large multinational religious organization was having much conflict (their words) with an issue about sexuality. With the issue's high visibility and deep pain and argument experienced by the larger church, the church issued a "request for proposals" looking for a consultant to assist in "healing and visioning." I applied for this project and was very clear about the need for a design team to work with me on developing the multi-stage agenda (Reflection #2). I knew that my interviewers were expecting a consultant with experience in healing and reconciliation. Even though I had experience in those areas and had written about the topics, I knew that I wanted to approach this opportunity differently. It was important to build capacity to "communicate well in the midst of human difference" so they could move forward with the creation of their preferred future (Reflection #1). The following documents illuminate this project, again labeled as "Document 1" etc.

1. The proposal I submitted, which was accepted.
2. Summary of the first Design Team meeting
3. Plan for achieving the steps identified by Design Team
4. Vision created by Design Team and participants.
5. Facilitator guidelines for developing and leading regional retreats

Document 1: My proposal to work with the religious institution

On Visioning and Healing

My approach to conflict management:

Normally, communication is considered a process used to transmit information and influence people. This transmission model is useful, but it restricts our understanding of the full place and power of communication in human life. More than a device, communication creates meaning and shapes the very realities in which we live. In short, our worlds are *made in communication and human differences are constructed and managed through communication*. How we communicate is consequential and can have great impact on the worlds in which we live.

Conflict is made of human difference and spans the zones of harm, challenge, and value. Conflicts can be valued, they can be challenging, and they can be harmful. My chief proposition is *we should manage differences in a way that avoid moving toward harm and encourage moving toward value*.

My approach to reconciliation and healing:

If we are interested in designing and implementing a change process, whether through visioning, conflict management, reconciliation processes, or dialogue, it is important to remember that *those responsible for implementing change need to be involved in designing the change*. A process that invites collaborative creation of a new future can also be reframed as one that *builds sustainable trust*. If trust has eroded in relationships (both personal and organizational), it can be rebuilt through a healing process, as in the following:

1. *Acknowledge* what has happened, the effect on people, on the system, and the resulting losses.

Be careful not to slip into communication that responds with justification, rationalization, or explanations.

2. *Allow feelings to surface.* Create safe forums for dialogue and opportunities to express their concerns, feelings, and issues in a constructive manner.
3. *Reframe the experience.* Put the situation into a larger context where the opportunities for change are more apparent, and people can see their own choices more clearly.
4. *Take responsibility.* Leaders can take responsibility for their own role, which makes it safe for others to take their own responsibility. Rebuilding trust is more than giving back that which was taken away. It means rebuilding something in better shape than it was originally. Strengthen relationships and enhance the culture.
5. *Forgive* yourself and others. The lingering pain can remain, but with forgiveness, that pain does not have to evoke negative behavior.
6. *Move on.* Make the commitment to create the future.

We convened an eight-member design team that represented the various viewpoints on the issue with stakeholders from clergy and lay people. This Design Team created a retreat where all stakeholders could begin to explore how to move forward together. This 2-day retreat was named *New Life: Healing and Reconciliation*. It ended up being repeated throughout the region. The summary of the first retreat is as follows, and shows the movement from dialogue to deliberation to action.

Document 2: Summary of the first Design Team meeting

Design Team Retreat Report

The *New Life* process kicked off with a retreat on June 4 and 5, at the Spiritual Retreat Center. Participants expressed “nervous hope” and “increasing excitement” about the energy of reconciliation and healing. Designed and facilitated by the New Life Design Team, the Retreat provided a “sacred space” for exploring the issues, questions, and concerns that need to be addressed. A new kind of communication replaced the typical method of conferences (speakers behind the podium, limited time for important conversations, and too many opportunities for debate and complaining). At the New Life Retreat, participants worked for two days at *managing* their differences, rather than *resolving* them. They took part in a round of introductions, broke bread together for dinner, and experienced a **New Life Dialogue** on Wednesday night, followed by a **New Life Deliberation** on Thursday. A final harvesting discussion concluded the Retreat.

The New Life Dialogue is a structured conversation where small groups address personal topics in depth, in order to better understand the perspectives of others and of themselves. The New Life Dialogue illuminated these issues at the retreat: Communication, Trust, Ministry/Mission, Leadership, Unity/Diversity, and Education.

The New Life Deliberation is a time to systematically look at important issues and explore them from three perspectives: concerns, visions, and actions.

Document 3: Plan for achieving the steps identified by Design Team

This retreat format was then repeated throughout the region, engaging ~50 participants, again bringing those with very diverse perspectives together. This box shows some of the language used to communicate and advertise the retreats.

New Life: Healing and Reconciliation

"If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all" (Romans 12:18).

All people of the diocese are called to participate in ***New Life: Reconciliation and Healing***—a process developed by a design team of lay and clergy leaders.

The goals of New Life are to:

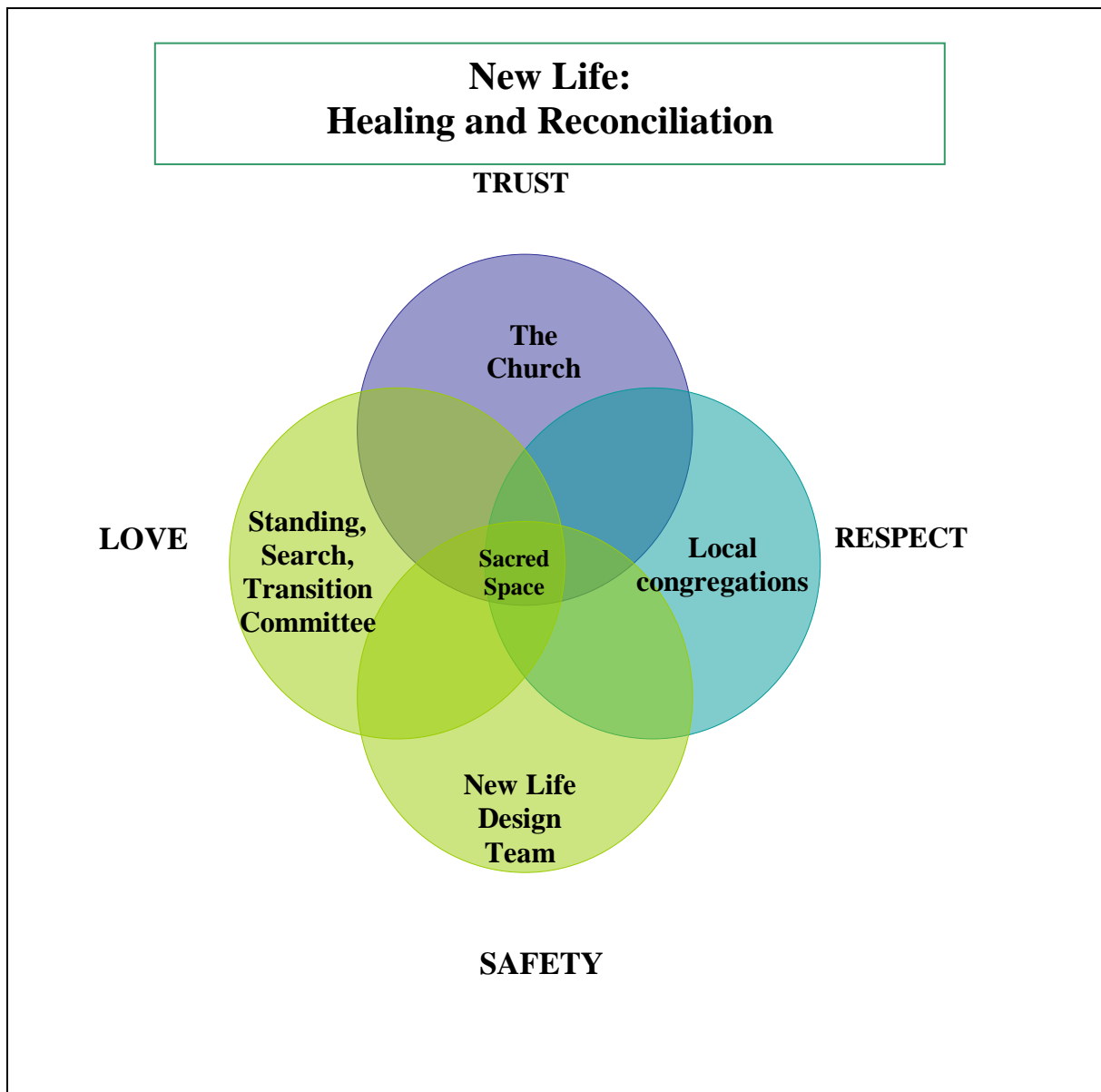
- Call together the community of Jesus Christ
- Develop a sustainable process for hope for healing, reconciliation, and restored trust
- Build communication capacities that are transparent, respectful, and loving
- Provide opportunities to live in the tension of diversity
- Create a Sacred Space as a safe place to share stories and explore differences
- Establish connections that transcend differences

The New Life Design Team has developed a process, which includes **New Life Dialogues**—structured conversations where small groups address faith and life in depth, in order to better understand their own perspectives and those of others. The dialogue is followed by **New Life Deliberation**, which is a discussion of concerns, visions, and actions that correspond to the issue raised by the participants.

Every member is encouraged to participate personally in the New Life retreat that will be held in your region. Your views and voice are of critical importance to the ministry we share.

Document 4: Vision created by Design Team and participants.

As the retreats progressed, an emerging vision was captured by the Design Team. It was consistently reviewed by all participants, encouraging collaboration on both process and emerging vision as the initiative moved forward.



Document 5: Facilitator guidelines for developing and leading regional retreats

The Design Team eventually saw themselves as also a facilitation team, who co-designed and facilitated the regional retreats. They created and used the following information to guide their work at the retreats. They began to see the entire process as a design of new life.

New Life Process: Overall Event Facilitation

What the Retreat **Facilitator should remember:**

- Manage the process (including the small group facilitators, time, breaks, space, large group processes)
- Help the group see itself
- Encourage commitment
- Acknowledge forward movement and contributions
- Remain impartial
- Quality control
- Manage Conflict

The Design Team enjoyed learning about dialogue and its power to help people manage their differences AS WELL AS a communication orientation that enabled them to design processes that work for all stakeholders. The team created a reminder document to help them privilege dialogue and not get pulled into argument. The following box shows the “script” they loosely used in introducing dialogic processes. The reference to CVA is enlarged on as a communication engagement exercise explained in the appendix.

Orientation to the New Life Dialogue and Deliberation

The word “dialogue” has been used in many ways. In the **our** process, we are using it to talk in a way that helps us see new possibilities for interaction and maybe fresh perspectives of the costs of conflict within the church and among members of our human community. When distrust, animosity, and polarization is occurring in a community, meaningful dialogue rarely happens without considerable thought and planning. Through the work of this Design Team, we are offering a process at this retreat that might help us spend more time in the future on our positive vision and goals and less energy on managing polarized debates and painful relationships. We want to attract a leader that can see and feel our positive vision and honest love for one another.

For Dialogue: We will go through an exercise tonight, in the same small groups as you met with in the Introductions, which will be a private conversation about the issues that most need to be addressed in our Diocese. You will be led by a Facilitator, who is a member of the New Life Design Team. The results of tonight’s discussions will be the basis for our work tomorrow.

For Deliberation: We will go through an exercise today that will enable you to address issues that you care about. Either you have had experience with this issue, feel strongly about it, or have energy to discuss it. Your small group will look at that issue from 3 angles: concerns, visions, actions. Explain CVA. Reminder: **People support what they create**. We appreciate and value your contributions to each of these issues and look forward to adding them to the emerging CVA.

Example #3: creating excellence in communication. A community college was experiencing much success in its staff and faculty communication processes. Retention was high among employees and generally, folks enjoyed working there. How wonderful then to hear them request an initiative to “make a good thing better!” I teamed with Stephen Littlejohn to engage our client to develop a process for development of *communication excellence* at their college. We requested the identification and convening of a design team. The college appointed a diverse group of 10 people, from a variety of organizational aspects. This design team worked together over a year in this manner, with more information about each stage offered in the boxes that follow.

- 1) Conducted multi-stakeholder interviews to explore “a vision of excellence in communication” at the college
- 2) Held experimentation meeting (design team planning and organization meeting experimenting with innovative communication skills and methods)
- 3) Held a work day (design team explored and decided on the communication methods and skills that they hoped to disseminate across campus)
- 4) Presented to administration (design team brainstormed a variety of high quality communication methods that they could use to present the proposed agenda to administration)

Document 1: Interviews of diverse stakeholders.

Our commitment to Appreciative Inquiry guided the entire initiative. To begin our work, the Design Team conducted 13 interviews using appreciative interviews. These interviews included a time of reflection about how the questions felt for them.

INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. What is your role here at College?
2. Tell me about College. What does the institution look like from your perspective?
3. What are the important relationships at College and what makes these significant? Are there any important behind-the-scenes relationships that people might not normally think about?
4. This initiative is designed to achieve positive change in interaction, working relationships, working climate, and communication at College. In your mind, what aspects of this should we emphasize? (Here is a list of some topics identified as important in previous workshops and initiatives. Which of these seem most important to you, and what significant items would you like to add?)
5. What other initiatives are currently working to achieve excellent relationships, interaction, and climate here at College?
6. If all of these initiatives are highly effective, what will result?
7. How can we best integrate this project with other similar change initiatives?
8. What practices here at College are particularly strong? What makes these stand out?

9. Think of one or two examples of organizations or groups at College that promote exemplary working relationships? Tell me about they achieve a good organizational climate.
10. What existing assets and resources at College will make it possible to achieve a high-quality work environment in the future?
11. What two or three best practices from your experience would you like to see developed here at College? Tell me why you selected these.
12. What else would you like to talk about?
13. This interview shows what an appreciative inquiry is like. How did it feel to you? What other kinds of questions do you wish had been included?

Document 2: Experimentation meeting

This meeting lasted half a day, and engaged the Design Team in a “taste” of what they could expect as they worked together over the upcoming months. The outcome of the meeting was a commitment to a longer workshop (which they called a “Work Day”) for the Design Team to better understand some of the excellent communication methods and skills that they might introduce to the campus.

The participants appreciated a brief workbook to develop that “taste” which included these documents:

- About Dialogue
- Depicting the Stakeholder System
- Issue Framing
- Design Toolkit
- Facilitation Toolkit

The following box shows an example of the first section , the “About Dialogue” part of the workbook. This box is followed by information about the “Work Day” where the Design Team committed to go deeper into understanding communication excellence, especially dialogue and managing human differences.

About Dialogue

Unlike ordinary conversation or debate, dialogue is a form of communication that helps build capacity in communities to explore hopes and concerns in a way that encourages mutual understanding and respect at times when differences can be difficult and challenging.

Dialogue is not just a set of techniques but a way of being with others. It is based on a commitment to view each person as unique and immeasurable. When engaged in dialogue, participants are open to the mystery of others, are curious about the experiences and thinking that have led to current positions, and come to appreciate the unique life journeys that affect their respective beliefs, attitudes, and experience. Dialogue does not preclude passionate disagreement, but provides opportunities in which differences are sites for exploration and growth.

People who are able to talk and listen together in an environment of trust and respect help make better social worlds; they make better decisions, they make better organizations, and they make better communities.

Many things can happen in the dialogue process. Participants may gain insight into their own experiences and beliefs. They may learn how to say what is important to them in a way that others can hear it and discover new important differences as well as shared concerns. Typically, participants learn important new things and come to realize that issues are more complex than previously thought.

Dialogue sometimes leads to action. While dialogue is a worthy end in itself, participants may be moved to act as a result. Dialogic techniques can be used effectively in support of action planning.

Document 3: Communication Design Team Work Day

The Design Team participated in the Work Day, with a goal to begin to choose some of the methods and skills to be showcased across campus. Role-play scenarios mirrored some of the issues that were offered as cases for potential communication improvement. The “Activities” are innovative communication skills and methods that enable dialogue and management of human difference.

TIME	ACTIVITY	OUTCOME
8:00 am	Agenda and meeting goals overview	Introduce Wall Mural
8:15 am	Role Play Scenarios (As stimulus for thinking)	Create draft list of current college best practices that are working well
9:15 am	Vision to Action Mapping (in small groups)	Finalize the vision of communication
10:15 am	Guided Tour (same small groups)	Develop Strategic Priorities and Fundamental Questions
11:30 am	Discussion: Content Areas	Review and adapt Content Areas based on Vision and Priorities
Noon	LUNCH	
Noon	Lunch Discussion: An Approach to Professional Development	DLI presentation and discussion
1:00 pm	Dialogue: Achieving the Vision (Using the LARC model)	Using a Dialogue format, explore possible continuation of the Communication Initiative and the Design Group

2:30 pm	Wall Mural	Choose a name for the Communication Initiative
3:00 pm	Closing	

Document 4: Brainstorming and Presentation to Administration

Since the Design Team had engaged in two meetings, explored a variety of communication methods and skills, and begun to plan the initiative, they decided it was time to approach the Administration with their suggestions. They asked themselves an excellent question: HOW should they make the presentation? The following boxes show the answers to that question. The first box is the presentation to administration. The Design Team shared with administration the steps they took in designing together access and implementation of high quality communication options. The second box is a summary of the emerging draft vision for ideal communication at the college. The third box depicts the ideas for sustainability, to ensure the new communication excellence vision is implemented and lived throughout all stakeholders on campus.

The Design Team presented to Administration

1. **Assess communication.** As the first stage, we conducted 13 interviews to inquire into the possibility of acting on a vision of excellence. We interviewed individuals representing executive management, administration, full and part-time faculty, staff, union, Senate, and branch campuses. Many of these are change agents, and all have a good sense of the institution's culture and communication practices. The interview guide appears in the appendix.
2. **Establish a design team.** A diverse design team was established to guide the project. Several individuals we interviewed agreed to serve along with others. To date the design team has met for 12 hours to conduct assessments, learn about options, and set directions for the project.
3. **Publish our work.** In the spirit of transparency, we will post each version of this report on appropriate websites. Members of the design team will also circulate it personally to colleagues.
4. **Experience, experiment, and plan.** The design team spent time learning about models that could be used to enhance communication and to experience one or more dialogue formats. The group will harvest what it is learning and set a series of recommendations at a design workshop.
5. **Recommend professional development and project expansion priorities.** By the end of June, 2007, the team will make its recommendations to the director for Organizational Learning and the Executive Team.
6. **Expand the initiative.** The design team expects to be involved in later phases of the project.

Draft vision of ideal communication

The interviewees and the Design Team expressed a number of concerns about achieving excellence in communication. Underlying these concerns was a strongly consistent preferred vision of communication for the institution.

1. **Listening is the positive core of communication.** Moving from an adversarial system, the institution models a culture in which administration, the union, the Senate, faculty, and staff:
 - Listen to one another and feel heard.
 - Honor multiple perspectives without polarizing.
 - Share information openly.
 - Explore interests and constraints clearly and respectfully;
 - Show eagerness to help others and meet needs creatively;
 - Continually communicate and keep others informed;
 - Always follow up on recommendations and actions of others;
 - Articulate mutual support through actions and words; and
 - Show others how they are working for continual institutional improvement and employee empowerment.
2. **Constructive connections abound.** College has created opportunities for employees to make useful formal and informal connections across departments that will foster a vibrant college culture.
3. **An institutional vision is widely shared.** With its excellent record of service and unique mission in the community, College has built a shared vision and commitment among

administration, faculty, and staff. Centers of influence, including administration, the union, and Senate, have aligned as a unified force.

4. Difference is managed in ways that value diversity. The diversity among students at College is a great asset, and the campus community continues to build capability for communication among diverse groups and individuals. Everyone strives to understand and integrate multiple perspectives in its communication.

5. An engaged climate of trust permeates the institution. Everyone experiences a workplace at all levels that embodies professional, equitable, and respectful treatment, and all stakeholders feel heard and valued. A vision of civility and dialogue is widely practiced.

6. Faculty, staff, and administration enjoy a collaborative partnership. College employs many highly educated, experienced, and effective people. Their concerns, ideas, and perspectives have become resources for institutional excellence and the basis for collaboration.

7. Empowered decision making is practiced. Institutional decisions are made on the basis of data gathered within a trusted process using insights, perspectives, and ideas freely shared from all levels. Authority is exercised within the context of empowerment and teamwork.

9. Opportunities for excellent communication are institutionalized. Regular formats and processes promote high quality communication and opportunities to connect across the institution. Hard issues such as equity, diversity, governance, and performance

accountability are explored constructively and safely on a regular, ongoing basis. Resources are allocated for individuals to participate in these processes.

10. **Participation is constructive.** The DAD model (decide-announce-defend) has been abandoned as a format for meetings. Meeting formats engage participants in constructive conversations and decision-making, and meetings are carefully designed and effectively facilitated.
11. **Managers are engaged with all levels of the organization.** Executives and other administrators are present, available, and welcomed. They nurture an expectation for constructive two-way communication that includes back-and-forth consultation, flexibility, and clear follow-up from below and above.

Ideas for sustainability

Several possibilities to sustain the effort have been explored, including the following:

1. **Harvest best practices and establish benchmarks.** Identify and gather best practices and create guiding principles for high-quality communication processes. Keep actions simple and concrete.
2. **Provide opportunities for conversations about positive communication practices.** Keep talking about communication and provide forums and other processes in which effective communication itself is the topic.
3. **Build capacity for dialogue and listening.** “Teach” good communication practice by engaging participants in well designed processes that show how good dialogue and deliberation can be done. Supplement this with direct training as needed. Include a deliberate reflection stage after each major event to harvest what was learned and plan next steps for “continuing the conversation.” Avoid didactic training and engage real institutional issues in all processes.
4. **Build the team concept.** Continue to expand and improve the team process. Make sure each team includes multiple stakeholders, including faculty. Enhance the facilitation training already started in AQIP and Organizational Learning. Develop a large, effective group of process-minded individuals available to help design effective meeting formats and facilitate productive meetings.
5. **Institutionalize a process of report-back and follow-up.** As an ongoing part of consultation and team collaboration, ensure that decision-makers report back results and the status of all recommendations. Where recommendations could not be implemented, always

report back the reasons. As a regular part of institutional life, always acknowledge the participation and contribution of the teams that devoted time to the task.

6. **Increase knowledge of effective meeting formats.** Through training and other means, make College leaders aware of the characteristics of good meetings and a variety of ways to make efficient use of time and engage participants productively.
7. **Create a system for ongoing dialogue.** Create a series of small, private, safe, and carefully facilitated dialogue groups that enable participants to explore hard issues constructively and respectfully without threat of harm. Design these dialogues in a way that would increase understanding among groups, open creative thinking, and change old patterns of interaction.
8. **Sponsor public forums.** Host frequent forums that encourage careful deliberation on significant issues. Use innovative processes that enable participants to work in small and large groups to develop and weigh action options. Use “keynote listeners” rather than keynote speakers in order to identify important themes, common concerns, and significant differences. Always follow up on these forums so that participants see results.
9. **Use mediation.** For very difficult issues, invite parties into mediation with a qualified neutral third party. Make use of principles of mediation, dialogue, and “crucial conversations” to create a safe environment in which new patterns of communication can be developed.

In this chapter, I have reflected back on my life and career and offered some insight into what has had significance for me. Two resulting categories of reflection are:

- 1) The World of Difference orientation invites us to honor the long road from dispute resolution to dialogue, knowing that we can privilege human differences as a means to create together the worlds in which we want to live and work.
- 2) A significant concept that emerged and was tested in my work is the power of design thinking. I want to continue to engage people in the design and subsequent creation of their preferred futures.

After exploring these two reflections in this chapter, I was able to look deeper into three examples from my work where these reflections surfaced. Next, in Chapter Five, I put these reflections into action, offering two cases in my consulting practice that I focused on during the writing of this dissertation. I created a simple way to see and experience each design opportunity, and used the World of Difference orientation to work in two different human systems. One system dealt with educational reform in Bogota, Colombia, and the other addressed minority education in the United States.

Chapter Five: Moving Forward

After reflecting on 40 years of research and practice in the fields of conflict management and social construction, this autoethnography has resulted in promising paths forward for the creation of preferred futures for people, communities, organizations, and countries. It has enabled me to develop my own mission statement for my own practice, and support and introduce two conceptual stances and some corresponding examples from my practice, as depicted in this chapter. The appendix will include some results from the actual cases offered in this chapter as well as methods and skills for utilizing the newly formed conceptual stances. Allow me to first introduce and then dissect my mission statement. This commitment was produced through the writing process of this dissertation.

Mission Statement: *I facilitate the design and creation of change, preferred futures, and hope by encouraging intentional communication and sustainable life choices in relationships, communities, and backyards.*

I facilitate.... My loyalty continues to be toward a facilitation focus rather than a directive focus. This loyalty shows in my practice—by the choices I make in assisting clients. For example, a mother and daughter inquired about hiring me to help the daughter who was having conflict with the professional sports dance team she worked for. Her conflict with her sports coach was deep, and I thought she was looking to build capacity through my coaching and exploration of her communication choices. When it turned out that what she wanted was support and encouragement to accuse and blame the coach for misdeeds, I had to explain my facilitative stance. It turned out they were more interested in advice and suggestions about how to indict the coach, so they ended up going toward a different kind of consultant (probably a lawyer).

The definition I use to guide my facilitation choices is: A facilitator is a person who helps a group free itself from internal and external obstacles or difficulties so that the group may more efficiently and effectively pursue the achievement of the session's desired outcomes (Kayser, 1994). Facilitators clarify communication, prevent miscommunication and manage conflict. As a process manager, the facilitator is more concerned with process and group dynamics than content. Relieved of having to give content input, a facilitator does not impose judgment or give solutions to the group.⁶

...the design and creation of change, preferred futures, and hope: In my previous decades as a communication consultant, I facilitated the creation of change and did not call out the design opportunity as often as I could. From this time forward, my design commitment is now a part of my toolkit, a suggested preliminary and ongoing step in every system intervention. As I assist clients in creating their preferred futures (which usually constitute some type of social change), I imagine we will experience hope. Knowing that those who will be affected by the change are involved in the design and creation of the change offers us all hope for better futures that work for us.

...by encouraging intentional communication and sustainable life choices: I have never been very fond of “seize the day” communication and decision-making. It rarely seems deliberate and intentional to short-sightedly communicate according to *what is the low hanging fruit*. Not that I think every communication needs to be long-term focused, but it is helpful to be intentional in communication. By considering multiple contexts, and possibly alternate perspectives in the system in which one resides, the decisions and path forward can be more sustainable.

Sustainable life choices are those which invite us to be more aware of our impact on our own life

⁶ See Littlejohn & Domenici (2007), pp. 297-313 for an overview of facilitation in a variety of contexts, which correspond with my commitments.

and others, whether it is in lifestyle choices, economic choices, and most important for my work, communication choices.

...in relationships, communities, and backyards: As I look back over the 40 years and ask myself where and when I was most effective in my consulting, I see that many of the more informal interactions were just as helpful as the more professional trainings and interventions. In the past few years, I have done much of my work at my kitchen table. I invite clients to my home, offer them food, introduce them to my dog, and inquire about their life. For large groups, I made sure that we shared casual and unrelated tidbits of our life rather than just diving into the business at hand. Whether a group is two people in a relationship beginning or ending, or possibly a community or workplace, I will meet them where they are. This could mean meeting in a backyard.

Using this mission statement as the basis for moving forward into the 2010s and 2020s, how will I move forward into putting the statement into action? I decided to privilege a set of conceptual stances. These are the attitudes and posture I bring when entering into a relationship with a client. My conceptual stances are:

- 1) World of Difference: Though I have tried for years to minimize and possibly eliminate my use of the word “conflict,” my clients and students still use it commonly as part of their culture and study. I engage that grammar briefly with them, but quickly shift to the World of Difference orientation. Conflict is the state of being challenged by human differences. We experience conflict when differences matter. Our communication about those differences affords us opportunity. The World of Difference orientation is a new way to transcend conflict management practices by acknowledging the social construction of difference (Littlejohn & Domenici, 2007). As introduced and explored

briefly in Chapter 3 and again in Chapter 4, the World of Difference orientation was created by me and Stephen Littlejohn after 30 years of conflict management study and practice. Humans can choose our response to human difference to either enhance or damage our lives. Managing that difference can occur in “zones of difference” and a quest to manage our communication to bring difference into the zone of value is one intentional choice.

The World of Difference concept asks that *communicators manage differences in a way that avoids moving toward harm and encourages moving toward value*. How does this conceptual stance play itself out in my work? One obvious way is that I rarely use a reference to conflict and always try to steer people to discuss their differences and whether they choose to continue to engage those differences. If so, the choice at hand is whether those differences bring value or challenge. One typical place I engage human difference is when clients are dealing with challenging workplace issues. When one worker is detail oriented, careful, and methodical, I will often see another worker as visionary, hectic, and unfocused. When I engage these differences, and after allowing them to unearth the descriptions of their “ways of working” clearly, I often will inquire about their desire to continue working together with these patterns. If affirmative, we will then explore ways to take advantage of these differences in order to work together in the zone of value. Appreciative Inquiry works well when choosing to reside together in the zone of value. Seeking to explore what works in their organization and relationship can set the stage for richer conversations about moving forward. We are taking the

communication perspective in this work, making our meaning together and choosing the distinctions that work in our system.⁷

- 2) Design thinking: Designing social change privileges human communication at an early stage where people have the opportunity to be creative, hopeful, and deliberate. I introduced my emerging commitment to design thinking in Chapter 4, after a reflection on the work I had done over the previous decades that had the most promise for creating better worlds. After detailing three examples in Chapter 4 where I used design thinking in work with client groups, I assembled the important skills and methods from that design work. I developed these into a simple guide to the flow of design and some corresponding skills and methods. This “engage/nudge/create/reflect” flow can be circular or linear, but is always organic, evolving from the participants’ involvement in the creation of their communication choices. This flow was utilized (tested) in two actual cases to be explored in this chapter. Again, the definition I have created to support my design thinking conceptual stance is: *Design is the co-construction of human social interaction intended to produce preferred futures*. This definition of design has its roots in the communication perspective and invites the following three commitments and ways of working. Let me introduce the commitments and explore them a bit.

My commitments are:

- Hold identity and perspective lightly
- People support what they create
- Communication shapes our identity and social worlds

⁷ Littlejohn and Domenici (2007) introduce this World of Difference orientation and the Communication Perspective in their book *Communication, Conflict, and the Management of Difference*. Chapter Two in that book details the World of Difference orientation.

Holding identity and perspective lightly. As a mediator and communication consultant for 30 years, I have facilitated social change within all types of relationships. In that work, the word “perspective” is much more effective in managing difference in human lives and human communication than a focus on one’s “opinion,” “belief” or “stance.” Perspectives are so much more flexible, adaptable, and even enjoyable. I love talking about perspectives. Consider the difference between beliefs (which we own and own us) and perspectives (which we hold lightly). The life revealed when we are not encumbered by our beliefs is quite an adventure. A perspective is more flexible than an opinion, more personal than a stance, and lighter than a belief. One’s perspective is often an integral part of one’s identity. If we can hold our perspectives and identities lightly, we have more freedom to investigate what we need at the moment, in this current context, in the current system. Then we (which includes “they,” my client groups) can move forward to create what works for them.

People support what they create. For many years I have begun my presentations, client encounters, and classes with the invitation to consider how *people support what they create*. We begin by exploring the possibility that involvement (in processes where people will have a stake in the outcome) leads to commitment (more ownership of the path forward). I often base this focus on the story about Kurt Lewin. German-born Kurt Lewin was Professor of Philosophy and Psychology at Berlin University until he fled to the United States in 1932 to escape from the Nazis. After teaching at Cornell and Iowa, Lewin, Douglas McGregor and others founded the Center for Group Dynamics at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1944. He had profound impact on group decision-making, especially when he did “experiments” after the Second World War, doing research for the United States Government. Lewin was asked to explore ways of influencing people to change their dietary habits towards less popular cuts of

meat. Due to the current conditions of scarcity and rationing, he and his colleagues wondered about the possibility of persuading women, as household “gatekeepers,” to prepare less popular cuts of meat, such as liver and kidney. He found that, if the housewives were involved in and encouraged to discuss the issues and able to make their own decisions as a group, they were far more likely to change their habits than if they had just attended lectures giving appropriate information, recipes and advice (Lewin, 1948). Ownership in the process of exploring the choices and decisions leads to better commitment.

Communication shapes our identity and social worlds. Again, as I have explored throughout this manuscript, the communication perspective is the basis for the work I have been doing for decades and will continue to do far into the future. I know that we construct our human relationships, our identities, and our systems through a process of making distinctions, often followed by decisions, about how to communicate and think about these distinctions. This is a continuous task of my social life, and I can help others organize the meanings they create with these distinctions, possibly coordinating those meanings into meaningful life and work.

With those three commitments in mind, and remembering my personal mission statement, I invited myself to ask, “How can I **organize** my work with people and groups to design and create their preferred future?” Through my reflecting back for this dissertation, I began to see four pieces of the “way of working” in designing social change. We *engage* with each other, *nudge* forward to move in a direction, *create* the preferred future when moving, and finally *reflect* on our interactions and design outcomes. This cycle can be entered from any one of the ways of working and move around and backward and forward.

With these commitments and ways of working in mind, I highlight initiatives with two client groups. One is a group of educators in Bogotá, Colombia, and the other is a group of

professionals concerned with increasing minority access to higher education. For each initiative, I used the “Engage/Nudge/Create/Reflect” flow as a general approach to an agenda for design meetings. As noted in the bullets below, this flow gives some preliminary structure for creating an agenda or a context for communication. In both of the sample cases I will highlight in this Chapter, I asked for a design team to be selected from a diverse sample of stakeholder groups interested in the issue at hand. For each of these cases, I introduce the context and then explore the process we used according to the flow below.

Engage/Nudge/Create/Reflect

Engage: *Interact to begin constructing the context, the relationships, and the meaning within which the design process will occur.*

- Who are you? (multiple levels) Who are we? (multiple levels)
- What gives you energy? What gives us energy?
- Curious questions: What do you wonder about (concerning this issue or these stakeholders)?
- What possibilities are possible when we co-design our collaborative future?

Nudge: *Facilitate a gentle urging in one direction. This nudge will be expressed tentatively, openly, and positively.*

- Scoping: move in the direction of a broader context or a narrower context.
- Reframing: Change the conceptualization of our topic to allow us easier access to productive communication about the issue.
- Generative Questions: these are breakthrough questions that stimulate creative thinking and new knowledge.
 - What draws you to this inquiry?

- What is most important to you about this gathering of people who care about this issue?
- What would it take to create change on this issue?
- What could happen to make you/us fully engaged and motivated?
- If our success were completely guaranteed, what bold steps might we take?

Create: *Co-construct together.*

- Design Issues: how can we work together to engage toward our preferred future? (Focus on the “how” to create a design or an agenda).
- Dialogic Processes: how should we communicate in order to enjoy and appreciate the process of communicating toward our preferred future? (Focus here on the type of communication choices we prefer).

Reflect: *Together look at what has been created. Wonder about the process, the dilemmas, the accomplishments and the relationships that have been constructed.*

- Notice patterns and adjust: What have we accomplished here and how does it feel?
Based on these reflections, what do we need to build on or change in order to continue making process toward the creation of our preferred future?
- Reflective questions: questions that invite us to explore and reflect on our patterns of communication, limits and strengths of our communication choices, and impact of our communication choices toward the creation of our preferred future.
 - What learning occurred for you in this experience? How did you gain that learning?
 - What are you still interested in learning more about? What direction would you like to pursue in the next steps?

- Where did you notice hesitations or challenges in the groups' work together?
What capacities does the group have to transcend those challenges?
- If you could do this collaborative work again, what might you/us do differently?
- What communication choices felt good to you? When did the energy in the room seem to lighten and become more productive?
- What worked in our session together? What was in place that enabled it to work so well?

In the following two cases from my communication consulting practice, I will highlight the Engage/Nudge/Create/Reflect flow with my comments in ***bold italics***.

Example #1: Design Thinking for Educators in Bogotá, Colombia.

Educational systems are facing a whole variety of challenges today, from evaluation systems that seem arbitrary, to classroom behavior issues, to retention and graduation. In Bogotá, Colombia, a group of educational leaders convened hoping to find new tools and approaches to meet their complex and difficult challenges. Design thinking is one of those new approaches. As a part of my ongoing collaboration with Sistemas Humanos, a consulting practice in Bogotá, I was asked to introduce design thinking and facilitate a design session with the hopes of developing a process to address changes to the education system in Bogotá. I was able to build on some of the great work that the design firm IDEO offers when they consult in education systems using design thinking. They ask the participants to “check their firmly held perspectives at the door,”⁸ which is so similar to my commitment to “hold our perspectives and identity lightly.” I put together a 2-day workshop with the group of educational leaders. The workshop

⁸ IDEO is an award-winning global design firm that takes a human-centered approach to helping organizations in the public and private sector innovate and grow. www.ideo.com (Design Thinking for Educators). : <http://designthinkingforeducators.com/>

followed the “Engage/Nudge/Create/Reflect” flow and was intended to give them a chance to *design together* a process to address their education system challenges. See the components of the flow in italics within this design workshop summary. I wrote the summary after the workshop ended, adding my comments in ***bold italics***.

Collaborative Design Practices in Education Contexts in Bogota

Sistemas Humanos is an organization in Bogotá Colombia that intends to create sustainable change in human relationships through communicative processes that increase the welfare of the people. Under the direction of Eduardo Villar and his colleagues, the organization began an innovative conversation with the hopes of creating collaborative change in the country’s educational system. Sistemas Humanos has a business unit called “How” which focuses more specifically on the processes for design and change, rather than the “what” of change. **How** works in collaboration with Kathy Isaacson, of **Strategic Engagement**, a communication consulting company in the US. The group which was invited to collaborate met under the auspices of a wonderful metaphor developed by consultant Alberto Mendosa. Imagining a hinge (which connects a door to its frame) the group consisted of two parts: systemic change consultants and education leaders. One group of systemic consultants had experience in designing and facilitating change and they spent the two days in collaboration with a group of teachers, principals, and other educational leaders. Kathy Isaacson led them in a process of design and process plan development, with a meta-communication focus on learning some processes for change.

The “Engage” portion of the workshop began even before the participants arrived. I was able to engage with the organizers of the workshop, building ownership and commitment by facilitating some pre-workshop conversations about their goals and ideas for process.

Together, they developed a metaphor to guide the workshop work, and commitment to conceptual underpinning that they wanted to make explicit.

The conceptual underpinning of the 2-day meeting is the merging of two ideas. *Social construction theory* offers that we create our social world through our communication. The meeting participants agreed that learning is socially constructed: human beings learn in integration with the other. This interaction can occur in many ways with conversation and language as the cornerstones. The manner (the “how”) of communication is just as important as the content (the “what”) of what we say. *Systemic practice* offers that the social good of individuals, families, institutions and communities is created in the interactions between those involved. Multiple voices and perspectives are honored and tensions among them are maintained.

It was from a *systemic social construction perspective* that the group convened. A shorter description of the conceptual underpinning is “The Communication Perspective.”

The questions uses in this first focus are intended to be “Engage” participants in understanding themselves as individuals and as a group, seeing their collective context and dreams.

The first focus of the group was to more fully be introduced to all the meeting participants. Who is the hinge? What resources do they bring that could affect change? How would they like to work together? The group called this focus the “collective framework.” Identifying the collective framework would be useful later, when the group used its collective efforts to build an action plan, and needed to know the resources they had at hand to address these actions. The invitational question was “Who are you and what resources do you bring to this group that might enable sustainable change in Colombia educational contexts?” The following bullets are an idea of the collective framework that emerged:

- Systemic psychologists in private practice
- Language therapist from Bilingual school
- School Psychologists
- Educators
- Education Leaders (Headmaster)
- Consultants, specializing in dialogue
- Clinical Psychologists
- Higher Education educator
- Systemic Practice expert
- Systemic Change expert

After the Hinge had been introduced, the group discussed some of its reflections on this emerging Collective Framework. Some of the comments included:

1. I was so surprised! I always thought that school had to do with the future of people, so you can be someone in the future. Now I am thinking that school is a way of acting in the present.
2. Happiness of children is utmost in our minds.
3. Is there a future for our current generation of students?
4. Short-term thinking and acting seems to be the comfort zone in our education context.
5. How can we create a future where children have a social sensibility?
6. Let's create something different WITH children, rather than FOR them!
7. One thing that connects this Hinge is our hope. And our variations of hope.
8. Let's remember how Einstein asked us to "not just teach the students, but to create spaces where they can learn."

9. How can we transfer systemic ideas to schools, so they can work in a spiral manner, rather than linearly?

The first interactions of the whole group occurred still within the “Engage” part of the workshop flow. I asked them to create a “collective framework from which to do the design work (their Hinge!).” They shared tidbits of themselves, from both personal and professional perspectives, and finally answered the question: What resources do you bring that could collectively affect change? The results of this conversation served as the framework of resources from which design of their educational change process would be created. This next focus in the workshop moved into the “Nudge” part of the flow. The participants were nudged forward, in a tentative direction, by scoping to a variety of parts of the issue and its context. Called the CVA, this model is an organized way to “Nudge.”

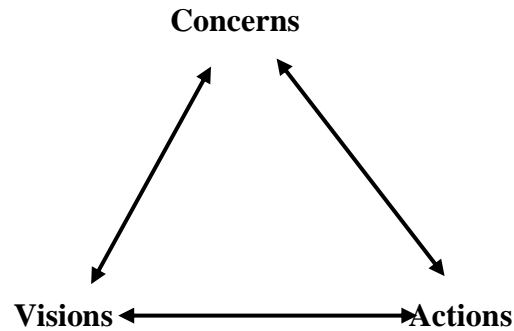
After the Collective Framework had been identified and discussed, the group prepared to move forward to address their pressing concerns about the Colombian educational system. They agreed to use a format introduced by Kathy Isaacson, called the “CVA Method.”

The CVA model is designed to help people connect problems with outcomes through action. It invites participants to move their minds from one element to the other.

CONCERNS are problems or difficulties that various group members are worried about.

VISIONS are ideas about the ideal state, what things should be like.

ACTIONS are concrete suggestions about how the concerns could be solved and the visions accomplished.



The group discussed how they could begin their discussion at any of these points—with concerns, visions, or actions. The important thing is always to move from one to another. For example, you might have the group discuss each of the following questions in turn: What are your concerns? If these concerns were solved, what would things be like? What practical steps could we take to achieve this vision?

Concerns

The group decided to begin with their concerns, knowing that they would then shift from this focus to one of their preferred vision. Divergent concerns would be identified, followed by a time of convergence, where one member of the group would facilitate a time of clustering the list into a workable few and frame those few into a set of issues to translate into visions. Concerns identified by the Hinge:

- Rich experiential learning would be so much more useful in school, rather than mere memorization.
- We need to develop transference in our students' lives, from what they learn to their real lives.
- How can education be significant for students? We want to connect learning to life.

- Parents and families need to be involved. What can we do about the families whose children cannot be involved in education due to behavior issues or financial issues? We should create a better dialogue with parents of children who cannot stay in school.
- The social and emotional development of students is important. We should create environments that help support and transform that development. Transformation should aim to help ALL GROW.
- Schools should create a parallel curriculum that utilizes all social networks. The training for curriculum does not really connect with social life.
- Teachers need to learn and use systemic thinking, so they can model relational and systemic practices.
- How can we inspire the process of learning? People need to be invited to feel more passionately.
- The teacher wants to share knowledge, but the student rarely puts it into practice. Conversations can grow because we can ask questions and then keep following up.
- How can we address the health and well-being of teachers, so they can feel energized (rather than exhausted)?
- We need to tie systemic social construction to practice in schools, and enable students to also access this focus.

After a period of time being nudged to different aspects of the issue and its system, the participants were asked to enter the “Create” aspect of the flow. As a first step in creating, they were asked to explore how best to work together during the creation time. They wondered whether they wanted to remain divergent, or to begin converging on possible ways of moving forward in the creation of education change.

After discussing these concerns, the group shifted to process talk. Divergent ideas from individuals are so important, and especially if creative processes are used. There is also much to learn from convergent processes. The group engaged in a process of finding a relationship between their ideas. Some discussions emerged about HOW to converge ideas:

- It is not our usual way of speaking to converge separate ideas. There are many ways to converge, and they fall along a continuum between facilitative (guiding communication) and directive (more prescriptive, giving advice and suggestions). In the mid-point of the continuum is an idea emerging from the work of HOW & Strategic Engagement. Nudging is a way of gently urging a group in a direction, with deliberate reflection and feedback to make sure the group is comfortable and has ownership of the direction.
- If the group has offered their ideas on post-it notes, or they are recorded on a flip chart, is this a time to disconnect them from those ideas? For example, by “separating people from the problem” (Fisher & Ury 1981), they are more apt to discuss the path forward safely.
- How many categories of concerns make the next step workable? Or does the group want to take each concern and address it separately before converging?
- The important point is to frame the issue in a way that makes it workable for the design process.

Issue framing information that was explored was offered as follows:

The quality of discussion depends in large measure on how the issue is framed. Issue framing sets the context for dialogue. If people are stuck and cannot constructively talk about an issue in one context, the key may be to shift contexts by re-framing the issue. Well framed issues possess these characteristics:

- They are open-ended questions permitting a variety of responses.

- They do not force either-or choices.
- They are sufficiently broad to give participants wide latitude of discussion, but sufficiently focused to permit constructive conversation.
- They are framed in ways that permit self-learning, exploration of complexity, and collaborative relationship building.

Some issues are undiscussable because they are framed in unsafe ways. The issue as stated invites polarized and potentially dangerous face-threatening responses. To make such issues discussable:

- Reframe from closed to open
 From “*Should the new president be a local or national person?*” to
 “*What qualifications should the new president have?*”
- From leading to inclusive
 From “*How can the union influence administration?*” to
 “*What kind of relationship should the union and administration have?*”
- Reframe from negative to positive
 From “*How can our negative climate be changed?*” to
 “*How can we build a constructive climate?*”
- Reframe from problem to vision
 From “*What can be done about racism?*” to
 “*How can our community build positive intercultural relationships?*”
- Reframe from positions to values
 From “*What is the best way to teach?*” to

“What interests, goals, and styles of learning should be incorporated into class instruction?”

Finally, the group decided to “Create” by clustering their divergent discussion into categories of similar issues. These would be transformed into visions.

The group participated in a convergence discussion, and came up with the following clustered issues that would be suitable for transforming into visions.

- Achieve wellbeing and recognition for the members of the educational community: How to listen, recognize and broaden the participation of the members of the educational community in what may give them wellbeing and happiness.
- Achieve the practice of relational and collaborative ideas in the educational context: How to get the educational community to practice and value the ideas that expand the relational and social skills of its members?
- Transcendence of the educational context unto the life of the people in the community: How to ensure the educational contexts as creators of transcendent changes in time and space, for all the community in which those are embedded?
- Transference of what is taught unto the everyday life practices: How to make the learning processes and contexts proposed in schools to open up possibilities for students and be transferred significantly into their lives? How to make this learning as well transferred unto the families of the students? All this in order to make them sensitive to what schools, what processes, and what relationships with education are appropriate for their sons and for themselves.

This next session is a brief time where the “Reflect” aspect of the flow was addressed. It was only momentary, but seemed necessary before the group could get back to creating. They were

asked to consider that past session of moving from divergence to convergence, and how effective the group was during that communication experience. For me, this reminded me how reflections could occur anytime during the design process.

Before beginning the work of translating these clustered issues into visions, the group reflected on the past session of framing concerns into issues.

- This work opened a new perspective for us in developing protocols for structured conversations.
- I have new hope for possibilities of transformation, especially understanding divergent and convergent processes.
- I am feeling so good! I see a new way forward, with hope.
- This is a new way of acknowledging issues, a search for “making visible” important topics.
- We are making issues relevant.

They thought they would move from the “Reflect” discussion back to the “Create” process, but the reflection illuminated what I call a “design dilemma.” To address a design dilemma may require the use of a design-within-design process, where a mini-“Engage/Nudge/Create/Reflect” flow is used. The result of that mini process was to make an important decision to develop one vision, rather than the multiple visions that the current path had them on.

Vision

A *Design Dilemma* was then discussed: After a group is satisfied with the issue framing, how do we know if we should move to visioning or action planning? Then after choosing one, how do we decide HOW to address it? Do a vision and action step for each issue? Choose one issue and

do both visioning and action planning? Work in small groups, each assigned an issue? The group decided to work together (Choice Architecture) and focus on a vision for each clustered issue. As they worked together, they quickly discovered that their emerging vision encompassed all of the issues. The group then decided to create one vision. Before they made that decision fully, they were asked, “It looks like we are creating a vision that encompasses all four issues. Am I correct? If so, what gains or costs will we have for going in that direction?” Reply: “the cost is that with too much convergence, we will have loss of details.” “The gain is that we are joining efforts, and the integration will make the action planning easier.”

Vision: The education in Colombia promises to be high-quality (recognizing the impact of each stakeholder) if we have the active participation of the whole community in the design, implementation and implementation of pedagogic-formative models and projects, all sensitive to the everyday life of its members and to a responsible impact in its social context.

This group requested a “Reflection” time more often as the choices became more clear and unified. As the facilitator, I took care during this reflection to make sure everyone was shifted intentionally from the task of “Create” at hand, and shift to a “Reflect” question. I asked them what they noticed about their collective framework in action.

Before moving into action planning toward this vision, the group did another reflection on their Hinge. What did they notice about the “Collective Framework in action”? What were they creating?

- I notice that our individual contributions have a collective focus.
- I see that new possibilities are arising.
- We have a very participative group. Humor keeps us going!
- The move to one vision occurred so quickly!

The process question was then asked by Kathy Isaacson: Would you like to create the next process step together? Or would you like us to propose a process suggestion for moving from vision to action?

Response: “That question reminds me of what happens in schools. We often just let the teachers decide, which makes the flow easier in some ways, and we don’t have to work so hard at creating together. But inside of me, I felt that I do want to be a part of deciding, because that is my commitment, to learn and participate in the design of important decisions. Then I know there will be more satisfaction with the result.”

Finally, the group did one last “Create” focus, and finished the development of a framework for designing education change in their region. They moved into practical action steps and discussions about how to continue their collective action once the workshop was over.

Action

The question that moved the group energy from visioning to action planning was, “What practical steps could you take to create this vision?”

Assessment:

- Meetings that collect the thoughts and necessities of the members from the educational community.
- To reframe or restructure the objectives of education in social, emotional and academic senses.
- Make a diagnosis of the pedagogical and formative necessities of the educational community members and the social context.

Training:

- Create participative work groups that target the creation and implementation of actions that respond to the necessities detected in the initial diagnosis.

- Organize further spaces and encounters like this one.
- Methodologies and practices that constantly evaluate the pertinence and coherence of the taught topics, in the everyday life of the members of the educational community.
- Create spaces for participation and discussion concerning the themes and goals of the quality of the education.
- Promote and train the members of the educational community for designing and managing dialogic and participation processes.
- Training processes for the members of the educational community concerning collaborative practices.
- Work with the administrative staff of schools in order to take the systemic ideas unto their management context.
- Participation of students (and their parents) from all grades in the design of the curriculum and in the learning topics of the school year.
- Joint training process with teachers and parents.

Policies:

- Revision and further changes to the public policies that regulate the education in Colombia.
- To intervene the existing educational policies through the divulgation and communication of the law projects that concern education.
- Planning, implementation and revision of the existing (and dreamt) projects.
- Dialogic encounters between different academic communities (urban and rural) with different needs.
- Design specific quality paths and accountability systems for the involved in the quality of education.

The group felt very satisfied as it pondered the concerns, visions, and actions it had created in an intense but stimulating meeting. They then embarked on a discussion about “how to continue the conversation.” The following are next-step suggestions:

1. Invite others to help us continue.
2. Don't stop here! Let's create a work group.
3. We need more training on these innovative processes.
4. How do we continue the construction or development of co-creation?
5. We could use one school as a pilot project. Use a smaller issue to design an experience using a similar process. We can address a school's dream or some micro-goal.
6. We can continue addressing the plan we have created, as well as learning this process.
7. Sistemas Humanos can take leadership on the next steps.

This 2-day design workshop engaged education leaders and systemic change specialists in the design of a way to address education change and reform in Colombia. The resulting design was further developed into a set of action steps and a follow-up events and experiences. In the appendix to this manuscript, the next part of the initiative is offered, which emerged as a 3-day retreat for educational principals and leaders from Bogotá.

Example #2: Broadening Participation of Minorities in STEM

The National Science Foundation (NSF) is a leader in driving the issue of broadening participation of minorities in science, technology, engineering and math. The United States government cares about this increased participation, in order to keep its innovative edge and increase opportunities for minorities in the workforce. For our purposes, I will use the acronyms: BP (broadening participation of minorities in STEM) and STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math). NSF funded an initiative that is two-fold:

- 1) Convene multiple diverse stakeholders to address this issue, using an innovative gaming methodology process, with the goal of contributing recommendations for BP.
- 2) Design and improve a model of collaborative social problem solving, by undertaking social science research during the initiative in order to improve and learn. NSF hopes to be able to better address other issues of national concern.

I was hired to design and implement a process to address this issue. My first request was to engage in a thorough and intentional design process. A seven-member design team was convened, which mirrored the potential stakeholders in the system of those who have interest (a stake) in the outcome of the BP issue. We also intended to explore the use of an innovative multi-stakeholder process which uses gaming methods for the purpose of system change. The design team was tasked to develop a process that convenes a large group of stakeholder participants who interact in a simulation to design, collaborate, prioritize and finalize recommendations for BP. The design team was asked to look at the potential in Prosperity Games as a process to address social issues through multistakeholder engagement. I organized the high level strategy of the design process, and developed the agenda for our first 2 day design meeting using the “Engage/Nudge/Create/Reflect” flow. As I detail this 2-day design process,

once again I will use ***bold italics*** to illuminate my comments about the correspondence to the flow.

Engage: One of the first ways of “engaging” the participants on the design team is to build common commitment and ownership to the goals and context of the meeting and the initiative.

We discussed:

- 1. Who are we as a design team? Who are we as individuals and as a group? How do we represent this system?***
- 2. How should we interact together as we design a process for BP?***
- 3. What is the scope of the issue we could address in order to develop a workable and appropriate design process?***
- 4. Who are the stakeholders that have a “stake” in the outcome of the issue we addressed in #3? Who cares about this issue?***
- 5. What logistics do we need to make decisions on and how should we make those decisions?***

The following context depiction and goals were thoroughly discussed, resulting in a shared context (Figure 1).

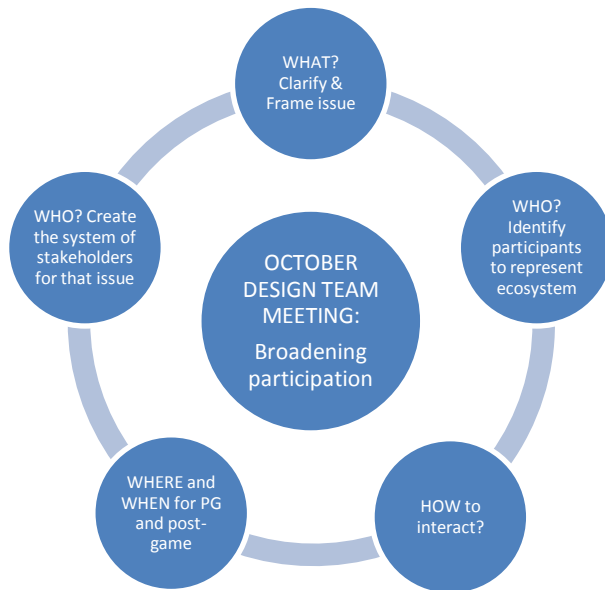


Figure 1: Design team meeting shared context

Goals of October Design Team meeting:

1. Build a design process that will result in high quality stakeholder engagement event
2. Clarify and frame the problem space (scope of issue) to enable stakeholder interaction
3. Develop a stakeholder system of 6 “teams” to simulate the issue space
4. Explore the virtual engagement space and further possibilities for online interaction
5. Identify participants that represent that issue space, and create plan for recruitment
6. Finalize place, date, and other logistics for Prosperity Game
7. Discuss gaming process and make key decisions about design dilemmas

Engage: A second part of the engagement was to inquire about the personal resources each person brought to this design process. I asked them: “Who are you personally and professionally? What do you bring as a person and also as a professional that could have a positive impact on our design process?” The ensuing conversation produced a “collective framework for design” that we knew we would utilize throughout the meeting and the initiative. The following is the resulting framework (names deleted) which illustrates how the

framework has individual and group components, both of which are important for collaborative design activities.

- Person 1:
 - Previously worked with NSF.
 - Currently is semi-retired and works with SRI International. SRI bridges the critical gap between research universities or national laboratories and industry by moving research and development from the laboratory to the marketplace. SRI works in Biosciences, Engineering, Education, and Information Technology, among other areas. The Education Division guides policy and practice and provides research-based solutions.
 - Current research is: Modeling Social Complexity in Education. Students often drop out of STEM disciplines, and the lack of student support is a fundamental weakness in the education system.
- Person 2:
 - Current professor of Communication at XX University. Focus in work comes from the premise that communication creates the social worlds we live in.
 - Research interests are: Dialogic Organization Development (to change an organization you need to change the conversation); Conversational Architecture; and Communication Design (How to design communication to achieve desirable outcomes).
 - Teaching a graduate level practical theory class on how to build relationships between academics and practitioners and will use the Prosperity Games as a

research case study. This class will archive the collected materials and data (notes and surveys) to make available to researchers.

- Person 3:
 - Has a PhD from in the Department of Wildlife Ecology and Conservation, but looks at the human dimension and intersection of psychology and cognition and how conflict drives policy.
 - Doing a postdoctoral fellowship at Arizona State University looking at the role can technology play in increasing or reducing conflict; modeling and engaging stakeholders in developing the model; and using simulation to generate synthetic empathy, which comes from the premise that empathy is the oil to get people to collaborate.
- Person 4:
 - Brings a practitioner's point of view to the table.
 - Senior Executive Director of Student Services and Corporate Internships with the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU).
 - Lots of experience in directing student programs, including a NASA funded project to prepare middle and high school students for STEM careers; integrating a K-20 approach to STEM preparation; student retention efforts; and peer support groups.
- Person 5:
 - Brings a practitioner's sensibility to the table.
 - Works with AIHEC to identify strategies that have an impact on student success at Tribal Colleges.

- Has also worked in mainstream institutions and on the board of regents at a state system.
- Is an advocate for Native issues in terms of looking at research, student retention, and broadening participation in STEM. Many academic articles written on these issues come from mainstream perspectives. Tribal Colleges are based on Native perspectives; some of the challenges are different than the mainstream.
- Person 6:
 - International perspective
 - Virtual engagement tools for potential Design Team use
 - Experience in communication and systems design thinking, with an emphasis on the “how” versus the “what.”
 - Will be a facilitator at the games.
- Person 7:
 - Professor and Director of the Graduate Program in the Department of Psychology at Howard University. Co-author of: *Creating the Opportunity to Learn: Moving from Research to Practice to Close the Achievement Gap*.
 - Has been involved with attempting to conceptualize, implement, and evaluate comprehensive models of school reform for a couple of decades.
 - Extensive work in the area of research methodology; the interface of culture, context, motivation and cognition; Black child development; and academic achievement in the American social context.
- Person 8: Collaboratively design systems. Believes that people support what they create and involvement leads to commitment. (Guess who this is??!!)

Nudge: After engaging each other as fellow humans, who bring both personal and professional resources to the design table, we were ready to move on to “Nudge” the group in a direction. This nudging is tentative and open, always allowing for process adaptations and reflections. By asking the group to focus on the scope of the issue, and the stakeholder groups that might be interested in that scope, we could then move forward into the “Create” part of the design work. The following results of that “Nudge” occurred.

Scope of issue: How should we frame the issue in a way that invites multi-stakeholder engagement, progress toward solutions, and ability to research the process?

Discussion of the scope question revealed the commitment to the underlying motivation to broaden minority students’ participation in STEM through more effective, efficient communication between researchers and practitioners involved with education, recruitment, and internship programs that target minority issues.

System of stakeholders: What stakeholder interests best represent the scope of this issue?

The design team went through an exercise to help determine preferences around categories and subcategories of potential stakeholder teams. The resulting tentative set of stakeholders emerged:

1. Minority Serving Institutions
2. Minority Serving Institutions Partners
3. Policy and Advocacy
4. Researchers (of education change within BP)
5. Practitioners (of education change within BP)
6. Employers (who hire minorities in STEM)
7. K-12 education system
8. Communities

9. Rest of the World

The guiding question that everyone agreed to at the end of the discussion, which would guide the entire initiative, was: *How do we ensure the impactfulness and sustainability for educational improvement suggested by research and practice collaboration, especially at MSIs?*

Create: The results from nudging the group toward scope conversations revealed rich dialogue about the issue and its system of stakeholders. This conversation took all of Day 1. We began Day 2 with an invitation to move to creation of the actual process that would be used to address the BP issue. In order to move forward, we needed a firm guiding question and a set of stakeholder groups (which we would later call “teams”) to move forward and begin inviting participants. I asked the design team to begin “creating” more specifically. The following collaborative decisions about the focus and stakeholders were made.

How do we broaden participation of minorities in STEM in order to foster innovation, creativity, economic development, and capacity building?

1. **Communities:** This team represents the social capital of the community of people who are impacted by BP. These stakeholders are not policymakers, but are affected by educational policy in important ways.
2. **Minority-serving Institutions (MSI):** This team represents institutions of higher education enrolling populations with significant percentages of minority students (HSI, HBCU, & TCU). Representatives will be administrative personnel.
3. **MSI partners:** These stakeholders are organizations and higher education institutions that work with MSIs or have exemplary practices in engaging minorities in STEM.
4. **K-12:** This stakeholder team represents K-12 schools, especially those within the MSI STEM pipeline.

5. **Practitioners:** This stakeholder team represents those who are implementing strategies for improving student engagement and success in STEM, including
- Faculty/instructors
 - Student support staff
 - Academic enrichment program staff
 - Curriculum specialists
 - Outreach and recruitment staff
6. **Research:** This stakeholder team includes those who are actively involved in research that informs broadening participation practice, including research on
- STEM talent development models, mechanisms, and practices
 - Organizational change
 - Diffusion of innovation
 - Bridging Indigenous and local knowledge systems and STEM
 - Evaluation research
 - Learning technologies
 - Policy
7. **Policy & Advocacy:** This stakeholder team represents those with responsibility for policy and advocacy supporting broader participation in STEM. This team will include Federal, State, and local agencies (such as Departments of Education, with special focus on underrepresented populations).
8. **Employers:** This stakeholder team consists of employers, both public and private sector, who hire STEM graduates, as well as provide internship opportunities in STEM fields.

Create: A second part of the creation stage was the challenge of inviting appropriate people who represent those stakeholder interests. I asked the question: “How best could we identify participants that represent those stakeholder interests? How can these participants be recruited and invited to participate fully in the Prosperity Game?” The design team members developed a process to identify and recruit those participants.

Reflect: We held off on any reflections until the end of the meeting. Because of the urgency of the design outcomes, it was difficult to make time for reflections. I posed these questions in the last hour. The team addressed them briefly, and also decided to continue to discuss them over virtual meetings and by interview. One of the results of the reflection is a set of “design dilemmas” which they agreed to discuss further. These are the three questions that got addressed briefly. It was frustrating not to have more time with this discussion.

1. What exciting new insights did you gain today about designing processes for broadening participation?
2. As you reflect back on the day, what design challenges do you see remaining regarding framing the issue, inviting multi-stakeholder engagement, and making progress toward solutions?
3. As we look to the next few months, what challenges and opportunities do we need to give attention to regarding the game process and how to research it?

Design dilemma: Framing of the issue has already begun based on the perspectives of individuals invited to be design team members. A consolation is that the design team represents a broad enough set of perspectives to mitigate against inviting participants with similar views.

Design dilemma: How far should we go in identifying the boundaries of a system? What voices are not included, and what are the costs and benefits of not including them?

Design dilemma: The design team needs to feel engaged in the issue and that their interests are represented in the framing question.

Design dilemma: Be careful not to recreate the problem by the way the system is depicted. A possible way to avoid this is to have an innovation team that creates new futures instead of recreating the old.

The resulting Prosperity Game was held in Washington DC February 2-4, 2014. A brief outline and summary document is offered in the appendix.

Conclusion

This chapter has highlighted the significant (for me) developments in the creation of my path forward as a communication consultant. After reflecting on four decades of research, writing, and practice, I have designed a personal mission statement, two corresponding conceptual stances, and a process “flow” that could illuminate those stances when working with client groups. Through the two cases where I enacted the flow and conceptual stances (in Chapter Five), I was able to affirm my tentative direction for the next phase of my consulting practice. My commitment to the World of Difference orientation and Design Thinking will show up in my consulting, my writing, and in my teaching.

In the Appendix, I offer more information about where the two cases from Chapter Five have gone since being “designed” using the “Engage/Nudge/Create/Reflect” flow. I have also offered a few examples of skills and methods that may correspond to the flow and the conceptual stances, which were assembled into workshop format.

During the week when I was putting the finishing touches on this manuscript, my 14-year old daughter was discussing a challenge she was facing in her eighth grade studies at school. She had to write an essay about friendship, and how it is important to know “the truth” when

engaging in honest relationships with people. She said to me, “How do I know the truth?” Our ensuing discussion highlighted my perspective that *we create meaning, sometimes called truth, in our interactions and communication*. We were able to enter this conversation by using the example of our love of dogs. She thinks that Pug dogs are cute, and I think they are ugly. So, what is the truth there? We both love dogs, and we both enjoy talking about dogs and owning dogs, and we have created a part of our relationship around that interest. There are a variety of perspectives within that focus where we differ. We are not differing on a version of truth, but are differing on a version of meaning that we have created over our lifetime (what constitutes a cute dog?). But for me, I know that I need to do more than be content with our differing perspectives, I want to “unlearn” my way of judging cute dogs. As Barrett (2012) taught me from his work with jazz improvisation, routine and patterns can be seductive and hinder our quest for new possibilities of moving forward. I wonder how my relationship with my daughter might change if I “unlearn” my perspective of what makes dogs cute? What else do I need to unlearn, so I can hold my perspectives and identity lightly?

The philosopher and poet Mark Nepo (2012) tells a story about a friend asking him “have you always been this articulate?” Mark’s contribution to that question invigorated me profoundly, as he offered a perspective on being articulate that I would never have imagined, “It’s been a life of working through words to reach all that is unsayable. This is the nature of art. The only things worth saying are those that are unsayable” (p. 127). I also have had a life’s work of words, and it has led me to some weighty insights. In this dissertation, I have tried to capture those insights, but I want to close in saying this: over the course of this 40-year journey in communication, I can’t even begin to communicate the depth of what I have learned. It feels unsayable.

Appendix

This appendix offers three focuses, which results from the mission statement and conceptual stances offered in Chapter 5. In that Chapter, I illuminated two client initiatives. In this appendix, I will present the follow-up activities and events that resulted from those design-focused initiatives. First, I will offer the educational reform initiative in Colombia and its resulting summary report (Initiative 1). Next I will overview the Prosperity Game agenda and summary of the event, which addressed increasing minorities in higher education (Initiative 2). Third, I include a training developed to put together skills and practices in design thinking and the World of Difference (Initiative 3).

Initiative 1: Next steps in the educational reform initiative in Bogotá Colombia

Designing Collaborative Practices in Educational Contexts

Principals Forum 2014: February 19 – 21, 2014

SUMMARY REPORT

Principals, teachers, and other administrators from 13 schools in the ACB (Association of Bilingual Schools) gathered for three days at the Club Altos de Chicalá near Anapoima Colombia. The objective of this forum was to experience a workshop in collaborative practices in order to develop communication and relationship skills that can lead towards the creation of collaborative teams and the generation of new forms of teaching, learning and relating.

The Project is divided in 3 phases: *pre-workshop*, *workshop* and *post-workshop*. The pre-workshop phase consisted of interviews with each of the school teams. The results of these interviews would guide the design of the agenda for the workshop using the following questions:

a) Purpose stories

- What are the life stories that have lead you to work in educational contexts?
- What is what you like the most about your work?

b) About the relation with the UCB (Association of Bilingual Schools)

- Since when have you been part of the UCB?
- What is what you value the most of being part of the UCB?

c) Communicational and relational challenges

- What challenges in the relationships with the educational community (teachers, parents, students, UCB) would you like to address during the Principals Forum 2014?
- What have you done so far to address those challenges?

- What are your dreams and hopes for the future of your school in relation to those challenges?

d) Expectations about the Principals Forum 2014

- If the Principals Forum 2014 were successful for you, what would have to happen?
- What would you like to tell and share with your colleagues after the Principals Forum 2014?

The workshop was structured on the communicational and relational challenges identified during the pre-workshop. Presentations and interactive exercises centered on different tools inspired by the challenges identified by the school teams, around the following themes:

- Communication Perspective
- Design Thinking
- Generative Dialogues
- Systemic Practices
- Facilitations Skills
- World of Difference orientation

The agenda of the workshop generally flowed as:

Phase	Objective	Time	
WORKSHOP	1. Welcome and contextualization	Wednesday February 19 2014	5:00 pm - 7:00 pm
	2. Crafting Circles	Thursday February 20th 2014	8:00 am - 12:00 pm
	3. Theater Forum		13:00 pm - 17:00 pm
	4. Reflections		17:00 pm - 17:30 pm
	5. Prototyping	Friday February 21 2014	8:00 am – 11:00 am
	6. Closing – Public Commitments		11:00 am – 12:00 pm

As a result of the exercises,

presentations, discussions, and shared learning, the participants created some strategies for addressing education challenges in their schools and in their association. The final session resulted in some closing commitments.

The strategies centered on a scheme offered by workshop facilitators, in answer to the question, “how do we begin?” These dynamic (each builds on the previous) steps were recommended:

1. Create the context
2. Create a joint purpose

3. Ideate: give voice to ideas
4. Develop a prototype

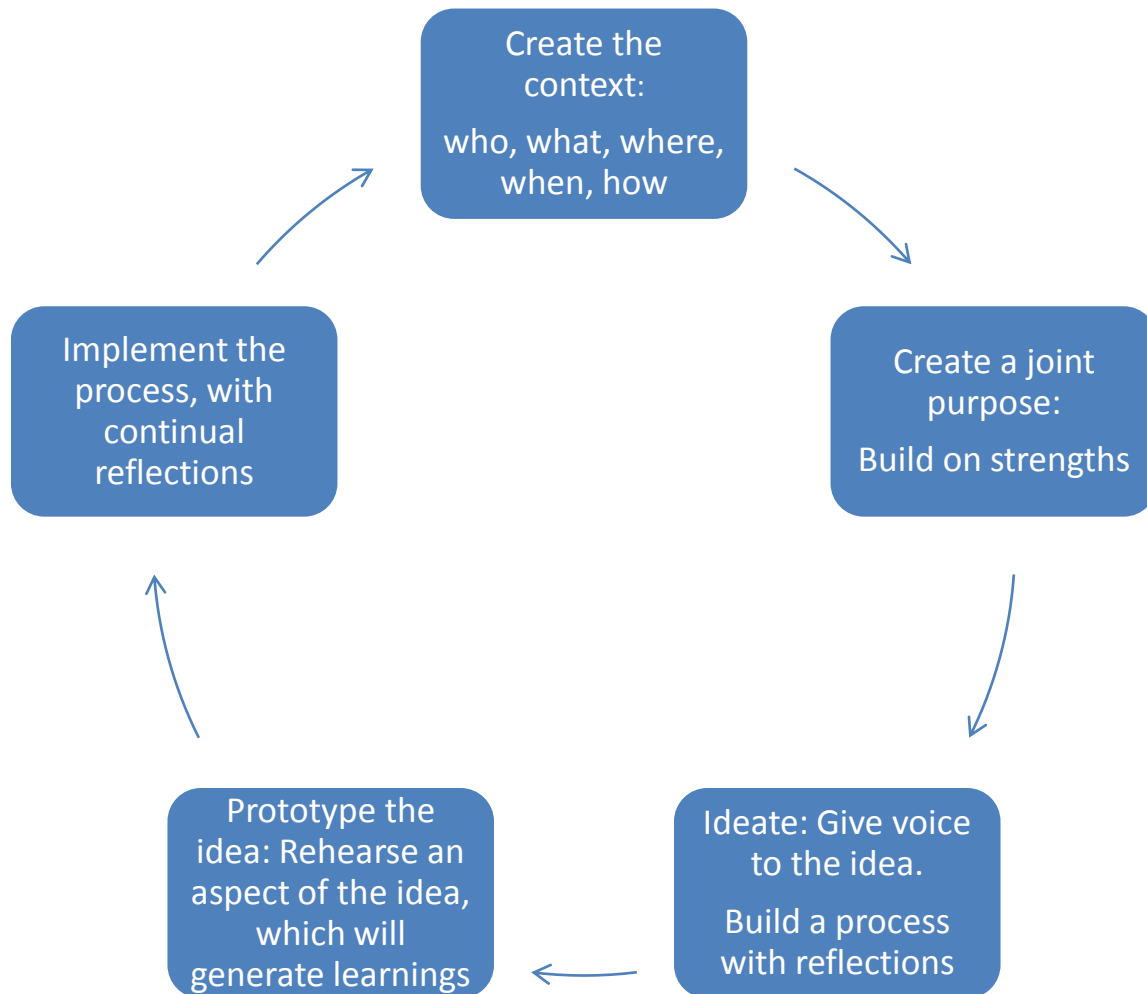


Figure 1: How to create social change in education

The group then worked in small groups to discuss strategies for moving forward in the design of education reform. For each, they develop a name of the strategy, a focus for the strategy (corresponding to Figure 1) and a general description of how the strategy would work.

Strategy #1

Name of strategy: *Building on Teacher strengths: 2014-2050*

Focus of strategy: Creating a joint purpose

General description of strategy: Using the “Listen/Acknowledge/Respond” cycle, teachers would be engaged in a series of activities intended to create a joint purpose around an educational challenge. Steps include:

1. Show a video to stimulate thinking
2. In groups of 3’s, each group addresses, “How did your teachers impact you? How did they make you what you are today?”
3. Share results to whole group, and build joint purpose based on strengths.

Strategy #2

Name of strategy: *Implementing Change*

Focus of strategy: Ideate: Imagine or conceive an idea

General description of strategy: Using the process, “Think/Pair/Share,” increasingly larger groups would imagine new ideas about implementing a change. This exercise would be followed by a Crafting Circles experience, where each circle is represented as a “de Bono Thinking Hat.” These focuses (Hats) help participants separate thinking into six clear functions and roles. Each thinking role is identified with a colored symbolic “thinking hat.” By mentally wearing and switching “hats,” they can easily focus or redirect thoughts, the conversation, or the meeting.

Strategy #3

Name of strategy: *How versus What*

Focus of strategy: Create Shared Purpose

General description of strategy: To create a shared purpose about the topic “inclusiveness of students,” the 2-hour exercise would begin with Reflecting Teams within a big circle. First, everyone writes on a paper “what do you think about human differences?” The first Reflecting Team in the middle of the circle would be school coordinators, followed by a team of teachers. The principal would be a Privileged Listener who spends the whole time listening and being curious. At the end, the results of the various conversations would be categorized.

Strategy #4

Name of strategy: *“Maybe the Complaining Mom has a Good Idea”*

Focus of strategy: Create Shared Purpose

General description of strategy: The focus of this strategy is to address the challenge of “complaining mothers who compare their children in school.” Six teachers would be identified who would observe student interactions with teachers for a day. Small groups of Principals and Coordinators, followed by groups of teachers, would discuss the findings. Then the World of Difference orientation would be used to meet with every stakeholder and ask “what can we do together to create a better way of managing this situation?” Using Listen/Acknowledge/Respond, they would create a shared strategy.

Strategy #5

Name of strategy: *Creating a New UCB School*

Focus of strategy: Creating Context and Shared Purpose

General description of strategy: With the potential of having a great social impact on the country, this strategy would design and develop a process to create a new school in the UCB. A proposal would be developed, and a Reflecting Team would assess its value and potential impact. Small groups would address mission, pedagogy, and other administration issues. A main question to ask of all stakeholders is “What would this new school contribute? Receive?”

Strategy #6

Name of strategy: *Reframing: Getting Teachers to Adapt to What We Want*

Focus of strategy: Define Context

General description of strategy: Using Alberto’s questions from the Crafting Circles, school Directors would take leadership in a process that creates a positive future for their school. First, they would look closely at the problem (teachers don’t adapt to what we want) and invite a Privileged Listener to reframe the statement. With a new positive focus, the group will explore the focus in a new way. This strategy also included developing a team of consultants from within the schools, who can assist other schools in issues that they have experience with.

The final commitments from all participants addressed these three questions:

- What has emerged during the workshop that you might bring back to your school? How will you begin to incorporate those things?
- What has emerged during the workshop that might impact the Association? What specific suggestions do you have?
- What commitment do you each personally want to make as a result of these learnings?

Initiative 2: Broadening participation of minorities in higher education and STEM

Prosperity Game agenda and summary

A diverse and committed group of people gathered at Howard University February 3-4, 2014, to interact over two days to address the question: *how can we more systemically broaden participation of underrepresented populations in STEM?* These 50 participants were convened for a Prosperity Game, an interactive strategic change process where the stakeholders that manage, support, and operate within the STEM education-to-work pipeline worked in small and large groups, building toward periods of “system interaction.” Stakeholder “teams” enacted an evolving and adapting system.

- **MSI team** consisted of the minority serving institutions: HBCU, PBI, HIS, TCU
- **MSI Partners team** consisted of institutions of higher education that are not MSI's, as well as research centers and institutes committed to broadening participation
- **K-12 team** consists of organizations that create and drive K-12 educational policy
- **Communities team** consists of those within the service area of an institution that have a stake in and an impact in broadening participation
- **Policy and Advocacy team** consists of governmental and nongovernmental organizations that are involved in developing and/or implementing policies that encourage broadening participation at regional and national levels
- **Practitioners team** consists of the range of recruitment, student support, advisement and academic programs that students experience along a STEM career
- **Research team** consists of researchers whose work is associated with impacting broadening participation
- **Employers team** consists of public and private entities that employ people to work in STEM fields or require some background in STEM

Stakeholders developed the following high-level summary recommendations:

- **MSI:** Disseminate evidence-based and culturally-relevant best practices to influence stakeholders and generate resources in order to transform K-16 STEM curricula.
- **MSI Partners:** Assess the effectiveness of STEM programs at MSIs and their feeder schools to identify best practices and create culturally relevant resources.
- **K-12:** Identify Master STEM teachers to engage with local community and 4-year colleges for co-teaching and professional development
- **Communities:** Community adds value to all stakeholder strategies. These strategies need consider the clear benefit for diverse “communities” across scope and scale.
- **Policy and Advocacy:** Convene stakeholders to incentivize innovation in STEM curriculum and alternate certifications
- **Practitioners:** Work collaboratively and systematically with K-20 to facilitate researched best practices in STEM education, leverage human and material resources and be active members of STEM decision-making
- **Research:** Transform research and evaluation to be culturally relevant, strategic, collaborative, and community-based.
- **Employers:** Invest in the talented diverse student pool, with increased student support, infrastructure support, and faculty exchanges

- The research component of this project is centered on three guiding research questions:
- What is the state of the art regarding communication gaming processes as a resource for building collaboration?
 - What are the challenges and issues associated with communication gaming processes and emergent design?
 - How do the Prosperity Game’s various conversational technologies—structured interactional frames or schemas—enable or constrain collaborative exploration of the problem space and solution development?

GAME AGENDA:

Monday Feb. 3

8:00 am	Registration and Continental Breakfast
9:00 am	Welcome and Inbriefing Players gather in Plenary area <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Welcome: Carrie Billy, CEO AIHEC • Overview of project: Al Kuslikis, AIHEC • Agenda Overview: Kathy Isaacson, Facilitator
9:30 am	Team Meeting Players gather with their assigned teams and address Worksheet #1
11:00 am	Elevator Speech Each team gathers in the middle of the room and listens to one-minute speeches addressing the question: <i>What does this system need to know about you?</i>
11:15 am	Team Meeting Teams adapt to what they heard in the system scan and decide how they want to interact in the system. Interactions could include: craft agreements, forge alliances, get information or accomplish other outcomes. Worksheet #2
Noon	Lunch
1:00 pm	Interacting in the System Engage the system and record activities using the “Interacting in the System” forms. Worksheet #3
2:00 pm	Team Meeting Based on the outcome of the interactions within the system, teams meet to reflect on the “system in action” and draft a set of starter recommendations. Worksheets #4 & #5
3:30 pm	Guided Tour Teams stay at their table, and the rest of the system “visits” each. Teams share their starter recommendations (5 minutes). Curious questions may be asked but team members do not respond.
4:30 pm	Team Meeting

Teams meet to adjust their recommendations, after hearing from the system. Put priority recommendations on a flip chart for voting.

5:30 pm **System Preferences**
Using dot voting, the players indicate their preferred recommendations.

6:00 pm **Dinner**
• ROW Reflections

8:00 pm **Adjourn**

Tues Feb. 4

8:00 am **Continental Breakfast**

9:00 am **Opening:** Presentation of Emerging Priorities
ROW Reflections

9:30 am **Team Meeting**
Teams meet to further reflect on the results of the first day and refine their recommendations, preparing to interact in the system. **Worksheet #2**

10:00 am **Elevator Speech**
Each team gathers in the middle of the room to listen to one-minute speeches that make announcements, or alert the system to the plans that affect the system.

10:30 am **Team Meeting**
Teams adapt to what they heard in the system scan and decide how they want to interact in the system. They can craft agreements, forge alliances, get information or accomplish other outcomes as they refine their recommendations. Again, use the Interaction Report Forms.

11:30 am **Interacting in the System**
Engage the system and record activities using the “Interacting in the System” forms.
Worksheet #3

12:30 pm **Team Meeting**
Teams meet through the working lunch (12 noon) to prepare their final recommendations.
Worksheet #6

1:30 pm **Final Recommendations**
5-minute presentations are given

2:30 pm **Closing Reflections**

3:00 pm **Adjourn**

Initiative 3: Designing Talk for Change

A workshop was created to illustrate the reflections and commitments as a result of the dissertation work. As part of my commitments to “Managing the World of Difference” and “Design Thinking” the following workshop was developed and offered. It will be the basis for the introduction of my dissertation results.

DESIGNING TALK FOR CHANGE WORKSHOP

Managing the World of Human Difference

Communication Perspective

World of Difference orientation

Featured Listeners)

2nd Order Change

Dialogue on Public Issues

Exploring Dialogue

Exploring Public Dialogue

Issue Framing

Guided Tours

CVA

Design Thinking

What is Design Thinking?

My commitments

Engage/Nudge/Create/Reflect

Deliberation, Harvesting, Reflection

The Communication Perspective

Communication is often viewed as a tool for transmitting information and influencing others. But it is more than this. A group or organization is defined and shaped—in all its aspects—by communication. **How** we communicate is as important as the topic or content of the discussion.

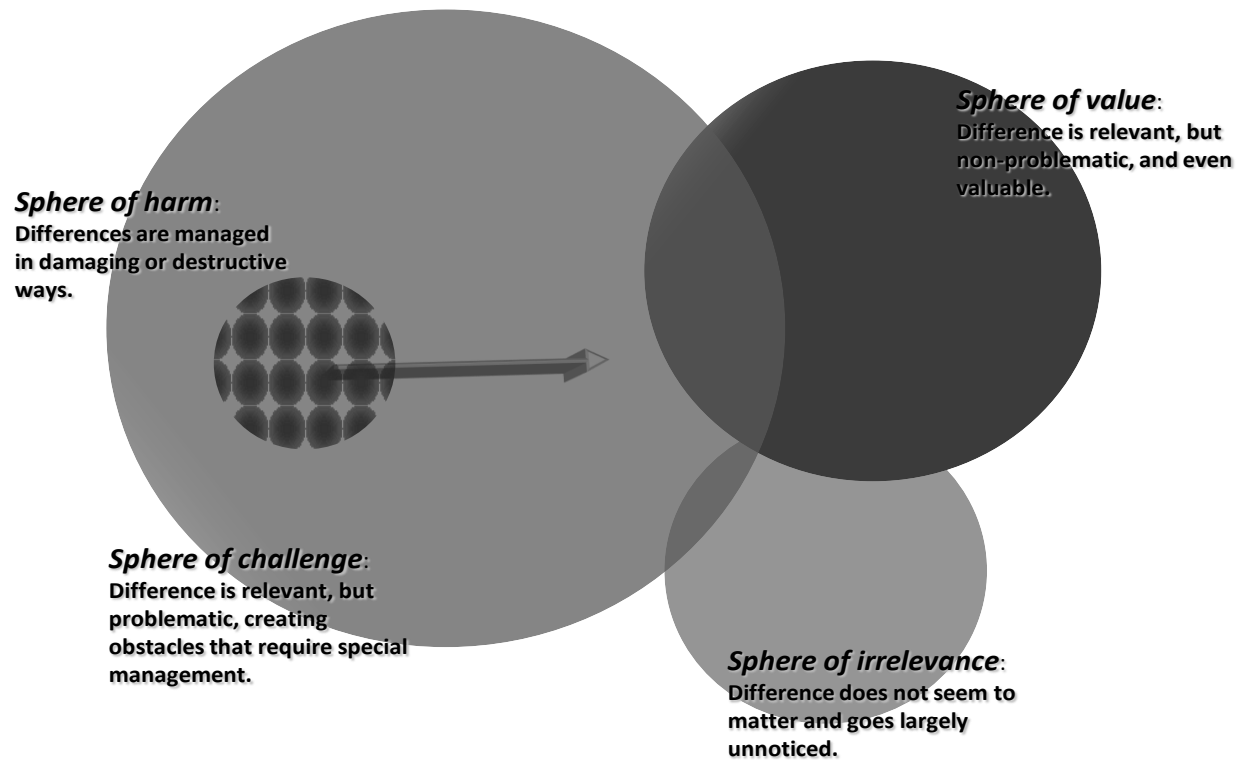
Consequently . . .

COMMUNICATION IS THE INESCAPABLE MEDIUM IN WHICH WE LIVE AND WORK.

WE MAKE OUR SOCIAL WORLDS IN AND THROUGH COMMUNICATION.

THE QUALITY OF LIFE IS SHAPED BY THE PATTERNS OF COMMUNICATION WE USE.

MOVING FROM HARM TOWARD VALUE



How do you know if the system is moving in this direction?

Participants show that they are staying in the tension between holding their own ground and remaining profoundly open to the other.

Reflect on this tension during and after design activities.

Remaining in the tension between holding your ground and being profoundly open to the other

Holding your ground

Holding your ground means that you can think and feel passionately about ideas, values, beliefs and decisions. However, your passion is in the context of:

- Recognizing your perspective is one of many and, therefore, telling your story as such
- Presuming there are good reasons for one's perspectives (yours and others)
- Allowing space for others to eventually express their perspective
- Honoring your life experiences which bring you to this moment in the conversation
- Believing it's possible for you to be open to the life experiences of others without negating or undermining the significance of your own experiences, beliefs, and values

Being profoundly open to the other

Being profoundly open to the other does not mean that you necessarily agree with their thoughts, beliefs, and values. It's possible to vehemently oppose someone's ideas and still remain profoundly open. You would do this by:

- Being genuinely present
- Giving the speaker your undivided attention
- Showing curiosity about the life experiences of the other participants in the room, even if they conflict with yours
- Allowing others to tell their story without trying to change it
- Letting the participants know that they have been heard

Featured Listeners

Featured listeners are individuals assigned the special role of listening without participating. They are introduced before the event as keynote listeners, and they reflect on what they heard at the end of the event.

Often featured listeners are individuals normally in an authority position, people often called upon to give a presentation. Instead of this role, such individuals are asked to learn what they can by listening to everyone else.

Featured listeners do not listen to judge what participants are saying, but to learn from their comments.

Featured listeners have several advantages:

- They empower ordinary members to express ideas without threat or interference from their bosses.
- They put policy makers in a position of learning from others and discovering new perspectives.
- They provide a means for participants to come to a larger understanding of what they have done.

Featured listeners must be prepared for their role by learning to listen for:

- Common interests.
- Significant differences.
- Fresh perspectives on issues and problems.
- Participant values.
- Participant passions.

At the end of the event, the listeners reflect on what they heard. This is often done in a fishbowl interview. You may ask the listeners:

- What stood out for you today, and what made this seem important?
- What surprised you?
- What do the participants seem to share?
- What are their important differences?
- What are your next steps?

Achieving Second-Order Change

There is another way.

Instead of trying to resolve conflict, we can communicate in ways that transform it. Processes of domination and negotiation typically aim for *first-order change*. By this we mean that differences are managed as participants come to change their resources and practices—how they think and what they do.

Processes of transformation, in contrast, create conditions for *second-order change*, or a shift in how we define the relationships among the parties or the system in which the conflict is occurring. Participants may not change their opinions on the issues they face, but they do change how they view themselves, others, and the community itself.

Transformative processes have several characteristics.

- They create categories that transcend differences among the parties by encouraging participants to find joining places, shared concerns, and mutual goals.
- They shift the discussion from persuasion, influence, and bargaining to listening, understanding, and respect.
- They create a forum in which all participants can learn significant new things about themselves and other people and to develop fresh ways of understanding the situation itself.
- They encourage participants to learn how each participant is a complex, fully formed individual with a history, values, and good intentions.
- They allow difference to stand without resolution. Intelligent, well meaning people can and should disagree, and that's okay.
- They set the stage for collaborative work in the future.

Dialogue in a world of difference

Dialogue asks people to communicate within the tension of holding your own ground and being profoundly open to the other.

Unlike ordinary conversation or debate, dialogue is a form of communication that helps build capacity in systems to explore hopes and concerns in a way that encourages mutual understanding and respect at times when differences can be difficult and challenging.

Dialogue is not just a set of techniques but a way of being with others. It is based on a commitment to view each person as unique and immeasurable. When engaged in dialogue, participants are open to the mystery of others, are curious about the experiences and thinking that have led to current positions, and come to appreciate the unique life journeys that affect their respective beliefs, attitudes, and experience. Dialogue does not preclude passionate disagreement, but provides opportunities in which differences are sites for exploration and growth.

People who are able to talk and listen together in an environment of trust and respect help make better social worlds; they make better decisions, they make better organizations, and they make better communities.

Many things can happen in the dialogue process. Participants may gain insight into their own experiences and beliefs. They may learn how to say what is important to them in a way that others can hear it and discover new important differences as well as shared concerns. Typically, participants learn important new things and come to realize that issues are more complex than previously thought.

Dialogue sometimes leads to action. While dialogue is a worthy end in itself, participants may be moved to act as a result. Dialogic techniques can be used effectively in support of action planning.

ARGUMENT AND DIALOGUE

In arguments we . . .	In dialogue we . . .
Try to win.	Try to understand.
Compete for speaking time.	Value listening.
Speak for others.	Speak mostly for ourselves.
Bring up the behavior of others.	Speak from personal experience.
Create a potentially threatening and uncomfortable environment.	Create an atmosphere of safety.
Take sides with others.	Discover differences even among those with whom we agree.
Polarize ourselves from those with whom we disagree.	Discover shared concerns between ourselves and others.
Feel unswerving commitment to a point of view.	Discover our uncertainties as well as deeply held beliefs.
Ask questions to make a point or put the other person down.	Ask questions out of true curiosity and the desire to know more.
Make predictable statements.	Discover significant new things.
Make simplistic statements.	Explore the complexity of the issues being discussed.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT OPTIONS

Stakeholder Opinion Processes—Public opinion processes are designed to discover public attitudes.

- Surveys
- Focus groups
- Deliberative polling

Stakeholder Education Processes—Educational processes aim to build understanding of technical and policy issues among stakeholder groups.

- Forums and presentations
- Interactive websites
- Study circles

Stakeholder Input Processes—Public input is very common in policy development.

- Public hearings
- Issue-framing workshops
- Gaming methodologies
- Consensus planning workshops
- Multi-stakeholder road-mapping
- Formats for E-Democracy

Stakeholder Deliberation and Dialogue Processes—Similar to the planning processes described above, these types of events allow participants to discuss policy problems in some detail with particular emphasis on the pros and cons of various options without having to achieve consensus.

- Citizen conferences
- Deliberation forums
- Study circles
- Dialogue

Dialogue Formats

Here are three sample models:

Public Conversations Model: This model consists of a series of private dialogues to explore personal feelings, ideas, and perspectives on a controversial issue. Representatives with opposing points of view are included, and the session is highly structured and facilitated to ensure a safe environment and prevent destructive debate.

Although the Public Conversations Project works in a variety of ways, they do use a strong set of principles. The PCP is known for using (1) the go-round method in which everyone has a chance to check in on a question without worrying about others piping in or interrogating them; (2) carefully crafted questions; (3) strong facilitation; and (4) clear ground rules. (see page #)

Study Circles Model: In a series of meetings, participants deliberate about an already-framed issue. Sessions follow a standard format. Educational materials are distributed in advance, and the discussions focus on policy options and community action. Leaders in this model are the National Issues Forums and the Study Circle Resource Center.

Participants in study circles usually meet four or more times and make use of a carefully researched booklet and other materials such as videos to provide balanced information on several sides of an issue. Discussions are systematic and concentrate on particular aspects of an issue in a highly organized fashion.

Vision-to-Action Model: Vision to action workshops offer a flexible approach for communities in large and small group formats to explore concerns, visions, and actions. Accomplished in a single- or multiple-session design, these events invite participants to move from a discussion of concerns to visions and then to create action plans.

Issue Framing

The quality of discussion depends in large measure on how the issue is framed. Issue framing sets the context for dialogue. If people are stuck and cannot constructively talk about an issue in one context, the key may be to shift contexts by re-framing the issue. Well framed issues possess three characteristics:

- They are open-ended questions permitting a variety of responses.
- They do not force either-or choices.
- They are sufficiently broad to give participants wide latitude of discussion, but sufficiently focused to permit constructive conversation.
- They are framed in ways that permit self-learning, exploration of complexity, and collaborative relationship building.

Some issues are undiscussable because they are framed in unsafe ways. The issue as stated invites polarized and potentially dangerous face-threatening responses. To make such issues discussable:

- Reframe from closed to open
From “*Should the new president be a local or national person?*” to
“*What qualifications should the new president have?*”
- Reframe from leading to inclusive
From “*How can the union influence administration?*” to
“*What kind of relationship should the union and administration have?*”
- Reframe from negative to positive
From “*How can our negative climate be changed?*” to
“*How can we build a constructive climate?*”
- Reframe from problem to vision
From “*What can be done about racism?*” to
“*How can our community build positive intercultural relationships?*”
- Reframe from positions to values
From “*What is the best way to teach?*” to
“*What interests, goals, and styles of learning should be incorporated into class instruction?*”

Guided Tours

The “guided tour” is a convenient and engaging way to have a large group learn about and reality-test smaller groups’ ideas. Here is one format:

1. Participants make plans in stakeholder groups and put key points on flip charts.
2. One by one, the participants “visit” each group’s station.
3. The group presents its plans to the others.
4. The others ask the group reality-testing and curious questions, but the group does not answer these.
5. A recorder in each group writes down the questions to refer to in the next stage. The groups go back to work to refine their plans based on the reality-testing questions they were asked.

Go-Rounds

Difficult discussions are often best started in a go-round. This is an excellent way to create a greater sense of safety and to make sure that everyone is heard.

- Each person takes a turn at expressing an experience, perspective, or point of view in response to a carefully crafted question.
- Others must listen until it is their turn. They may not question, respond, or interact.
- After the go-round, participants may ask one another questions of curiosity to learn more and understand better. Rhetorical or argumentative questions are not permitted.
- After one or two go-rounds, participants may have an open discussion of the issue at hand.

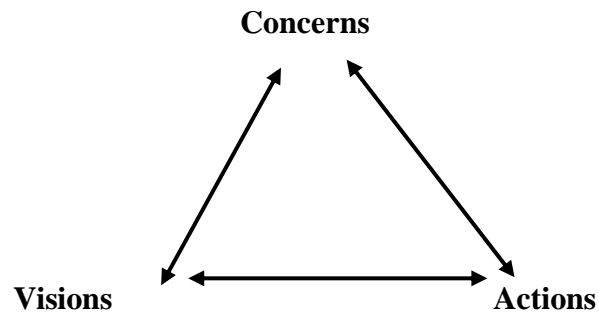
Concerns, Visions, and Actions

The CVA model is designed to help people connect problems with outcomes through action. It invites participants to move their minds from one element to the other.

CONCERNS are problems or difficulties that various group members are worried about.

VISIONS are ideas about the ideal state, what things should be like.

ACTIONS are concrete suggestions about how the concerns could be solved and the visions accomplished.



You can start a CVA discussion with any of these points—with concerns, visions, or actions. The important thing is always to move from one to another. For example, you might have the group discuss each of the following questions in turn:

- What are your concerns?
- If these concerns were solved, what would things be like?
- What practical steps could we take to achieve this vision?

Design Thinking

The word “design” has a historical connotation from architecture, fashion, and graphics. The field of communication and social construction has taken the word in a new direction. The following are examples of the evolution of “design” and the three bridges these definitions offer.

Flusser & Cullars (1995): The bridge between hard and soft

To design is to take unshaped material and bring it into form that is visible. In contemporary discourse, design is the bridge between the hard, quantifiable, scientific activities and the soft, qualitative, aesthetic. This bridge between hard and soft creates a new culture that features both art and technology.

Terzidis (2007): The bridge between past and future

Design is a conceptual activity involving formulating an idea intended to be expressed in a visible form and carried out into action. This definition invites a paradox, because as designers step into the future, searching for new innovation, they must utilize ideas from the past in some way. This bridge between past and future inquires about the “idea” or “truth” and whether designing is searching for that truth, or truly discovering a new innovation.

Aakhus (2007): The bridge between communication theory and practice

Design is an activity of transforming something given into something preferred through intervention and invention. The bridge between communication as an object of focus and as a process to create intervention reflects the theory/practice tension that is illustrated in social construction today. Design is both a way to understand communication and is an approach for investigating the social world from the standpoint of communication.

Isaacson (2013)

Design is the co-construction of human social interaction intended to produce preferred futures. This definition of design has its roots in the communication perspective (page 2) and invites the following three commitments and ways of working.

Communication Design: Constructing Interaction Toward Change

My Commitments

- Hold identity and perspective lightly
- People support what they create
- Communication shapes our identity and social worlds

Commitments to Practice: Engage/Nudge/Create/Reflect

Engage/Nudge/Create/Reflect

Engage: *Interact to begin constructing the context, the relationships, and the meaning within which the design process will occur.*

- Who are you? (multiple levels) Who are we? (multiple levels)
- What gives you energy? What gives us energy?

Curious questions: indicate a provisional stance, a way to show your interest in the other and their perspective. These questions provide a sense of safety and comfort.

- What do you wonder about (concerning this issue or these stakeholders)?
- What possibilities are possible when we co-design our collaborative future?

Nudge: *Facilitate a gentle urging in one direction. This nudge will be expressed tentatively, openly, and positively.*

- Scoping: move in the direction of a broader context or a narrower context.
- Reframing: Change the conceptualization of our topic to allow us easier access to productive communication about the issue.
- Generative Questions: these are breakthrough questions that stimulate creative thinking and new knowledge.
 - What draws you to this inquiry?
 - What is most important to you about this gathering of people who care about this issue?
 - What would it take to create change on this issue?
 - What could happen to make you/us fully engaged and motivated?
 - If our success were completely guaranteed, what bold steps might we take?

Create: *Co-construct together.*

- Design Issues: how can we work together to engage toward our preferred future? (Focus on the “how” to create a design or an agenda).
- Dialogic Processes: how should we communicate in order to enjoy and appreciate the process of communicating toward our preferred future? (Focus here on the type of communication choices we prefer).

Reflect: *Together look at what has been created. Wonder about the process, the dilemmas, the accomplishments and the relationships that have been constructed.*

- Notice patterns and adjust: What have we accomplished here and how does it feel? Based on these reflections, what do we need to build on or change in order to continue making process toward the creation of our preferred future?
- Reflective questions: questions that invite us to explore and reflect on our patterns of communication, limits and strengths of our communication choices, and impact of our communication choices toward the creation of our preferred future.

- What learning occurred for you in this experience? How did you gain that learning?
- What are you still interested in learning more about? What direction would you like to pursue in the next steps?
- Where did you notice hesitations or challenges in the groups' work together? What capacities does the group have to transcend those challenges?
- If you could do this collaborative work again, what might you/us do differently?
- What communication choices felt good to you? When did the energy in the room seem to lighten and become more productive?
- What worked in our session together? What was in place that enabled it to work so well?

Design Issues

1. **Constraints and criteria**—*What factors do we need to take into account in order to make good decisions about participants and processes?*
2. **Framing the issues**—*What do we want participants to address and how shall we state or present these issues to them?*
3. **Mapping the stakeholder system**—*Who are the players on these issues, what are the affinity groups, and how do they connect with one another?*
4. **Expected outcomes**—*What do we want to result from the processes of engagement we design?*
5. **Participation**—*Who should participate in these processes, and how do we recruit them?*
6. **Participant roles**—*What roles will participants take? What will be the role of agency representatives, technical experts, stakeholder representatives, others?*
7. **Methods**—*What methods and formats should be employed in public engagement?*
8. **Information base**—*What information should be provided to the participants, and how will this be established and presented?*
9. **Sponsorship and funding**—*Who will sponsor this engagement process and how will it be funded?*
10. **Personnel and logistics**—*Where and when do we host the events, and how should they be staffed?*
11. **Results, next steps, and continuation**—*What will happen after the events and how will these lead to subsequent events?*

Factors of success

Public engagement events are more likely to be successful when:

- The process is intense and interactive.
- The sponsoring agency is responsive.
- Participants are motivated.
- Deliberation is careful and critical.
- Participants are involved in decisions.

Reframing

Reframing is restating something in a new, constructive way. It helps soften and neutralize hostile comments, encourage progress, clarify, and introduce creative possibilities.

Reframe from past to future.

Member: I'm getting sick and tired of all these absences. We can't get any work done.

Facilitator: So you want to see attendance improved in the future, right?

Reframe from negative to positive.

Member: They gave me too much to do.

Facilitator: You would like to see your assignments lessened?

Reframe from personal attack to problem definition.

Member: If that secretary forgets to give me my messages one more time, I'm going to scream.

Facilitator: So messages are not getting received?

Reframe from a demand to a goal or need.

Member: I want a private office so I can get away from all of these distractions.

Facilitator: You want to get your work done without distraction.

Reframe from individual concern to group concern.

Member: They won't give enough money to buy good refreshments.

Facilitator: So the group needs to figure out a way to get enough money for good refreshments.

Reframe from concern to vision.

Member: Kids don't have enough to do in this town.

Facilitator: So you would like to have lots of youth activities here.

Scoping

Scoping is redirecting to a new context, or shifting the question being discussed.

Just like a photographer looking for the right frame, you can “scope out” to a broader topic, or “scope in” to a narrower topic. You can even “scope around” to a variety of different perspectives. Conversations can take a positive turn when the context shifts, especially when stuck. Scoping to a new context can provide the basis for collaborative problem-solving. When parties get stuck, you can ask:

- 1) Are we even asking the right questions here?
- 2) Can we step back and look at a broader context? Tell me more about the larger picture.
- 3) Let’s spend a little time talking about the details. Tell me more about your personal experience with this issue.
- 4) Who has a different way of looking at this issue?

Generative Questions

Questions for focusing collective attention

- What questions, if answered, could make the greatest difference to the future of the situation we are exploring here?
- What assumptions do we need to test or challenge in thinking about this situation?
- What would someone who had a very different set of beliefs than we do say about this situation?

Questions for connecting ideas and finding deeper insights

- What's emerging that is new for you? What new connections are you making?
- What have you been hearing that had real meaning for you? What surprised you? What puzzled or challenged you?
- If there is one thing that has not been said but is needed in order to reach a deeper level of understanding/clarity, what would that be?

Questions that create forward movement

- What would it take to create change on this issue?
- What could happen that would enable you/us to feel fully engaged and energized in this situation?
- If our success were completely guaranteed, what bold steps might we choose?
- What conversation, if begun today, could ripple out in a way that created new possibilities for the future (or our situation)?

Thanks to the Public Conversations Project for these questions.

Wall Murals

Purposes of murals

- Get people on their feet and moving
- Enable a different, more graphical form of expression.
- Give voice to people who may not be comfortable speaking in public.
- Chart the progress of a meeting
- Provide an overview of the group's thinking
- Increase creative thinking
- Build collaboration

Types of murals

- Individual group posters
- Clustered Post-It notes
- Dot voting
- Organized idea sheets
- Free-form comments and reflections

Elevator Speeches

One-minute elevator speeches are an effective way to help participants identify key points, stay within a time limit, and report results.

Groups can go through a round of elevator speeches after a period of planning or consultation.

As a result of the round of speeches, everyone has a better idea of what is happening in the whole system.

Participants will become more informed for upcoming planning periods.

Deliberation, Harvesting, Reflecting

As the design phase of an initiative comes to an end, participants may interact by deliberating, harvesting, and reflecting. In **deliberation**, participants say which choices they like and which ones they don't like, and they say why. They share experiences they have had that make certain choices seem better. After they deliberate, they will **harvest** the insights they gained from the discussion.

In a good deliberation, group members identify their values, or the things that are most important to them. In a deliberation session, each choice is discussed one at a time. Each choice is discussed quite thoroughly before moving on to the next one. The pros and cons of each choice are discussed.

The facilitator can help by asking good questions. Here are some examples:

- *What would this choice mean for how you do your job?*
- *What makes you say this one is best?*
- *If we decided on this choice, how would it affect our whole group?*
- *What would people who don't like this choice say?*
- *What would you find impossible to live with?*
- *What trade-offs are you willing to make?*

Once all of the choices are discussed, the group does **HARVESTING**. Here they discuss what they have learned about themselves and their group from the discussion. Good questions are the key for making harvesting successful.

- *Now that we have discussed the proposals at some length, do you still view the problem the same way?*
- *What shared values have we discovered here?*
- *What differing values have been uncovered? What consequences do we seem most able to live with?*
- *What disagreements do we still need to work through?*

The participants will commit to continuous **reflection** through the design phase and into the living out of their future. What is working? What is in place that is enabling it to work? What is not working? What patterns of communication are in place that are creating this situation? How can we preserve what is working, or change what is not working.

RESOURCE SAMPLER

The Taos Institute

- <http://www.taosinstitute.net/> The Taos Institute is a community of scholars and practitioners concerned with the social processes essential for the construction of reason, knowledge, and human value.

The National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation (NCDD)

- <http://ncdd.org/> This site describes a wide variety of dialogue models, techniques and organizations. It also has a handy quick reference glossary as well as tools for teachers and trainers.

Public Conversations Project (PCP)

- <http://www.publicconversations.org/> You can download a complete script on how to organize and facilitate a Public Conversation. There are also numerous “Dialogue Stories” listed by people who have used this model in a variety of settings and on different topics.

National Issues Forum (NIF)

- www.nifi.org This organization is dedicated to promoted nonpartisan public deliberation in communities across the country. The website describes their method of deliberation and how to organize a local forum as well as offering a wide selection of predetermined topics to choose from. Their motto is “Think. Deliberate. Act.”

Public Dialogue Consortium (PDC)

- www.publicdialogue.org This is the website of the organization providing the UNO dialogue training. It addresses a way of working with communities, sample projects, and bios of PDC consultants.

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