Conflict Transformation

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Introduction[1]

I have been using the phrase "conflict transformation" since the late 1980s. I remember that timeframe because it came on the heels of intensive experience in Central America. When I arrived there my teaching vocabulary was filled with the terminology of conflict resolution and management. But I soon found that many of my Latin colleagues had questions, concerns, even suspicions about what such concepts meant.

Their worry was that quick solutions to deep social-political problems would not change things in any significant way. "Conflicts happen for a reason," they would say. "Is this resolution idea just another way to cover up the changes that are really needed?" Their concerns were consistent with my own experience.

The ideas that inform much of my work arise out of the Anabaptist-Mennonite religious framework. This framework emphasizes peace as embedded in justice, the building of right relationships and social structures through a radical respect for human rights, and nonviolence as way of life. In the course of my work in finding constructive responses to violent conflict, I became increasingly convinced that much of what I was doing was seeking constructive change. I recall that by the late 1980s I would talk about this work as a process of *transformation*.

However, this notion of transformation raised new questions. Despite its problems, the term "resolution" was more well-known and widely accepted in mainstream academic and political circles. "Transformation," on the other hand, was regarded by many as too value-laden, too idealistic, or too "new age." But for me, the term was accurate, scientifically sound, and clear in vision.

Conflict transformation is accurate because the core of my work is indeed about engaging myself in constructive change initiatives that include and go beyond the resolution of particular problems. It is scientifically sound because the writing and research about conflict converge in two common ideas: conflict is normal in human relationships and conflict is a motor of change. And transformation is clear in vision because it brings into focus the horizon toward which we journey, namely the building of healthy relationships and communities, both locally and globally. This process requires significant changes in our current ways of relating.

In this essay, I will engage a creative tension between the metaphors of resolution and transformation in order to sharpen understanding. However, this is not done to minimize or degrade the term "resolution" or the many individuals who creatively prefer it as the best prism for understanding their work. My purpose is to add a voice to the ongoing discussion and search for greater understanding and clarity in human relationships.

But the question remains, what is this transformation stuff? This essay is an attempt to share my understanding of conflict transformation as an orientation, an approach and a framework. It describes transformation as a lens and a strategy for approaching conflict.

The Lenses of Conflict Transformation

In common everyday settings we experience social conflict as a time when a disruption occurs in the "natural" discourse of our relationships. As conflict emerges, we stop and take notice that something is not right. The relationship in which the difficulty is arising becomes complicated, not easy and fluid as it once was. We no longer take things at face value, but rather spend greater time and energy to interpret what things mean. As our communication becomes more difficult, we find it harder and harder to express our perceptions and feelings. We also find it more difficult to understand what others are doing and saying, and may develop feelings of uneasiness and anxiety. This is often accompanied by a growing sense of urgency and frustration as the conflict progresses, especially if no end is in sight.

If someone uninvolved in the situation asks what the conflict is about, our initial explanations will typically be framed in terms of the specific issues the parties are dealing with. This is the content of the conflict, the immediate problems that must be resolved through problem solving and negotiation.

However, the transformational approach addresses this situation somewhat differently. This is because conflict transformation is more than a set of specific techniques. It is about a way of looking and seeing, and it provides a set of lenses through which we make sense of social conflict. These lenses draw our attention to certain aspects of conflict, and help us to bring the overall meaning of the conflict into sharper focus.

Before proceeding further, I should describe what I mean by a lens as a transformational tool. I recently purchased a set of glasses that have what are called progressive lenses. This means that in my eyeglasses I have three different lens types in the same frame. One lens helps bring into focus things at a great distance that would otherwise be a blur. A second brings objects that are at mid-range into a clear picture. The third helps me read a book or thread a fish line through a hook.

It is interesting to note three things about my new glasses and how they relate to a transformational view. First, if I try to use the close-up lens to see at a distance, the lens is counterproductive and useless. Each lens has its function and serves to bring a specific aspect of reality into focus. But when it brings that layer of reality in focus, other layers are placed in a blur. If you look through a camera with a telephoto lens or through a microscope at a slide of bacteria you can find this happening in dramatic fashion.

Second, no one lens is capable of bringing everything into focus. Rather, I need multiple lenses to see different aspects of a complex reality, and cannot rely exclusively on one lens to see the multiple layers of complexity.

Third, the three lenses are held together in a single frame. I need each of the different lenses to see a particular portion of reality, and I need them to be integrated to see the whole picture. Thus, we need lenses that help us address specific aspects of conflict as well as a framework that holds them together in order to see the conflict as a whole.

So what are useful lenses that bring varying aspects of conflict complexity into focus and at the same time create a picture of the whole? This essay will suggest three.

First, we need a lens to see the immediate situation.

Second, we need a lens to see past the immediate problems and view the deeper relationship patterns that form the context of the conflict. This goes beyond finding a quick solution to the problem at hand, and seeks to address what is happening in human relationships at a deeper level.

Third, we need a lens that helps us envision a framework that holds these together and creates a platform to address the content, the context, and the structure of the relationship. From this platform, parties can begin to find creative responses and solutions.

Conflict Transformation: A Simple Definition

Although the definition is relatively short, its various components lend it a degree of complexity. To better understand conflict transformation, an explanation of each component is needed. Together, these components attempt to capture the attitudes and orientations we bring to creative conflict transformation, the starting point of such an approach, and the various change processes involved in such an approach.

To Envision and Respond: A transformational approach begins with two pro-active foundations: 1) a *positive orientation* toward conflict, and 2) a *willingness to engage* in the conflict in an effort to produce constructive change or growth. While conflict often produces long-standing cycles of hurt and destruction, the key to transformation is the capacity to envision conflict as having the potential for constructive change. Response, on the other hand, suggests a bias toward direct involvement and an increased understanding that comes from real-life experience. Both "envision" and "respond" represent the ways we orient ourselves toward the presence of conflict in our lives, relationships, and communities.

Ebb and Flow: Conflict is a natural part of relationships. While relationships are sometimes calm and predictable, at other times events and circumstances generate tensions and instability. A transformational view, rather than looking at isolated conflict episodes, seeks to understand how these particular episodes are embedded in the greater pattern of human relationships. Change is understood both at the level of immediate issues and the broader patterns of interaction.

Life-Giving Opportunities: On the one hand, this phrase suggests that life gives us conflict, and that conflict is a natural part of human experience and relationships. Rather than viewing conflict as a threat, the transformative view sees conflict as a valuable opportunity to grow and increases our understanding of ourselves and others. Conflict helps us stop, assess and take notice. Without it, life would be a monotonous flat topography of sameness and our relationships would be woefully superficial. This phrase also suggests that conflict creates life and keeps everything moving. It can be understood as a motor of change that keeps relationships and social structures dynamically responsive to human needs.

Constructive Change Processes: This notion emphasizes the capacity of the transformational approach to build new things. Conflict transformation begins with a central goal: to build constructive change out of the energy created by conflict. By focusing this energy on the underlying relationships and social structures, constructive changes can be brought about. The key here is to move conflict away from destructive processes and toward constructive ones. The primary task of conflict transformation is not to find quick solutions to

immediate problems, but rather to generate creative platforms that can simultaneously address surface issues and change underlying social structures and relationship patterns.

Reduce Violence and Increase Justice: Transformation must be able to respond to life's on-the-ground challenges, needs, and realities. How do we address conflict in ways that reduce violence and increase justice in human relationships? *To reduce violence* we must address both the obvious issues and content of any given dispute and also their underlying patterns and causes. *To increase justice* we must ensure that people have access to political procedures and voice in the decisions that affect their lives.

Conflict transformation views peace as centered and rooted in the quality of relationships. This includes both face-to-face interactions and the ways in which we structure our social, political, economic, and cultural relationships. In this sense, peace is a "process-structure," a phenomenon that is simultaneously dynamic, adaptive, and changing. In essence, rather than seeing peace as a static "end-state," conflict transformation views peace as a continuously evolving and developing quality of relationship. It is defined by intentional efforts to address the natural rise of human conflict through nonviolent approaches that address issues and increase understanding, equality, and respect in relationships.

Direct Interaction and Social Structures: The above concerns about violence and justice suggest that we need to develop capacities to engage in change processes at the interpersonal, inter-group, and social-structural levels. One set of capacities points toward direct, face-to-face interaction between people or groups. The other set underscores the need to see, pursue, and create change in our ways of organizing social structures, from families, to complex bureaucracies, to structures at the global level. This requires a capacity to understand and sustain dialogue as a fundamental means of constructive change.

Indeed, many of the skill-based mechanisms that reduce violence are rooted in communicative capacities to exchange ideas, find common definitions, and move toward solutions. But dialogue also plays a crucial role in the maintenance or change of social structures. Through dialogue, these structures can be modified to be more responsive and just.

Human Relationships: Relationships are at the heart of conflict transformation.

Rather than concentrating exclusively on the content and substance of the dispute, the transformational approach suggests that the key to understanding conflict and developing creative change processes lies in seeing the less visible aspects of *relationship*. While the issues over which people fight are important and require creative response, relationships represent a web of connections that form the broader context of the conflict. It is out of this relationship context that particular issues arise and either become volatile or get quickly resolved.

Conflict and Change

Both conflict and change are a normal part of human life. Conflict is continuously present in human relationships, and the fabric of these relationships is constantly adapting and changing. Before discussing practical approaches to conflict transformation, it is important to better understand the link between conflict and change.

There are four central modes in which conflict impacts situations and changes things:

1. the personal,
2. the relational,
3. the structural, and
4. the cultural.[2]

In addition, we can think about these changes in response to two questions. First, from a descriptive view, what does conflict change? And second, from the standpoint of responding to conflict as it arises, what kind of changes do we seek? In the first arena, we are simply acknowledging the common patterns and impact of social conflict. In the second, we recognize the need to identify what our values and intentions may be as we actively seek to respond, intervene, and create change.

Change Goals in Conflict Transformation: Transformation understands social conflict as evolving from, and producing changes in, the personal, relational, structural and cultural dimensions of human experience. It seeks to promote constructive processes within each of these dimensions.

Personal: Minimize destructive effects of social conflict and maximize the potential for personal growth at physical, emotional and spiritual levels.
Relational: Minimize poorly functioning communication and maximize understanding.

<u>Structural:</u> Understand and address root causes of violent conflict; promote nonviolent mechanisms; minimize violence; foster structures that meet basic human needs and maximize public participation.

<u>Cultural:</u> Identify and understand the cultural patterns that contribute to the rise of violent expressions of conflict; identify cultural resources for constructively handling conflict.

The personal dimension refers to changes effected in and desired for the individual. This includes the cognitive, emotional, perceptual, and spiritual aspects of human experience over the course of conflict. From a descriptive perspective, transformation suggests that individuals are affected by conflict in both negative and positive ways. For example, conflict affects our physical well-being, self-esteem, emotional stability, capacity to perceive accurately, and spiritual integrity. Prescriptively, (i.e., relating to what one *should* do) transformation represents deliberate intervention to *minimize* the destructive effects of social conflict and *maximize* its potential for individual growth at physical, emotional, and spiritual levels.

The relational dimension depicts the changes affected in and desired for the face-to-face relationships. Here issues of emotions, power, and interdependence, and the communicative and interactive aspects of conflict are central. Descriptively, transformation refers to how the *patterns* of communication and interaction in relationships are affected by conflict. It looks beyond visible issues to the underlying changes produced by conflict in how people perceive, what they pursue, and how they structure their relationships. Most significantly, social conflict makes explicit how close or distant people wish to be, how they will use and share power, what they perceive of themselves and each other, and what patterns of interaction they wish to have. Prescriptively, transformation represents intentional intervention to minimize poorly functioning communication and maximize mutual understanding. This includes efforts to bring to the surface in a more explicit manner the relational fears, hopes and goals of the people involved.

The structural dimension highlights the underlying causes of conflict, and stresses the ways in which social structures, organizations, and institutions are built, sustained, and changed by conflict. It is about the ways people build and organize social, economic, and institutional relationships to meet <u>basic human needs</u> and provide access to resources and decision-making. At the descriptive level transformation refers to the analysis of social conditions that give rise to conflict and the way that conflict affects social structural change in existing social, political and economic institutions.

At a prescriptive level, transformation represents efforts to provide insight into <u>underlying causes</u> and social conditions that create and foster violent expressions of conflict, and to promote nonviolent mechanisms that reduce adversarial interaction and minimize violence. Pursuit of this change fosters structures that meet basic human needs (<u>substantive justice</u>) and maximize people's participation in decisions that affect them (<u>procedural justice</u>).

The cultural dimension refers to the ways that conflict changes the patterns of group life as well as the ways that culture affects the development of processes to handle and respond to conflict. At a descriptive level, transformation seeks to understand how conflict affects and changes cultural patterns of a group, and how those accumulated and shared patterns affect the way people in a given context understand and respond to conflict. Prescriptively, transformation seeks to uncover the cultural patterns that contribute to violence in a given context, and to identify and build on existing cultural resources and mechanisms for handling conflict.

The Big Picture: Connecting Resolution and Transformation

The transformation metaphor provides an expanded view of time, situates issues and crises within a framework of relationships and social context, and creates a lens to look at both solutions and ongoing changes.

Thus far we have discussed the concepts that make up the various components of conflict transformation. We now want to move from the concept of transformation to the practice of transformation. We must therefore establish an operative frame of reference for thinking about and developing the design of transformational approaches. Our starting point requires the development of an image of our purpose, or what I call the "big picture." Since intractable conflicts are usually quite complex, developing a "big picture" helps us to develop a purpose and direction. Without it, especially in the arena of intractable conflict, we can easily find ourselves responding to a myriad of issues without a clear understanding of what our responses add up to. We can solve lots of problems without necessarily creating any significant constructive social change at a deeper level.

Resolution and Transformation: A Brief Comparison of Perspective

|	**Conflict Resolution Perspective**	**Conflict Transformation Perspective**
The key question	How do we end something not desired?	How to end something destructive and build something desired?
The focus	It is content-centered.	It is relationship-centered.
The purpose	To achieve an agreement and solution to the presenting problem creating the crisis.	To promote constructive change processes, inclusive of -- but not limited to -- immediate solutions.
The development of the process	It is embedded and built around the immediacy of the relationship where the presenting problems appear.	It is concerned with responding to symptoms **and** engaging the systems within which relationships are embedded.
Time frame	The horizon is short-term.	The horizon is mid- to long-range.
View of conflict	It envisions the need to de-escalate conflict processes.	It envisions conflict as a dynamic of ebb (conflict de-escalation to pursue constructive change) and flow (conflict escalation to pursue constructive change).

Creating a Map for Conflict Transformation

It is common in the study of conflict to develop a map that helps us to engage in conflict assessment and analysis. Similarly, it is useful to have a map of what we mean by transformation. Figure 1 provides a shortcut overview of such a map, which can help us to visualize the development of a strategy to constructively transform conflict.

This transformational framework has three components, each of which represent a point of inquiry in the development of a response to conflict:

-   the presenting situation,
-   the horizon of preferred future, and
-   the development of change processes linking the two.

The movement from the present toward the desired future is not a straight line, but rather a set of dynamic initiatives that set in motion change processes and create a sustained platform to pursue long-term change. Such a framework emphasizes the challenge of how to *end* something not desired and how to *build* something that is desired.

The Big Picture of Conflict Resolution

Inquiry 3: Development of Change Processes
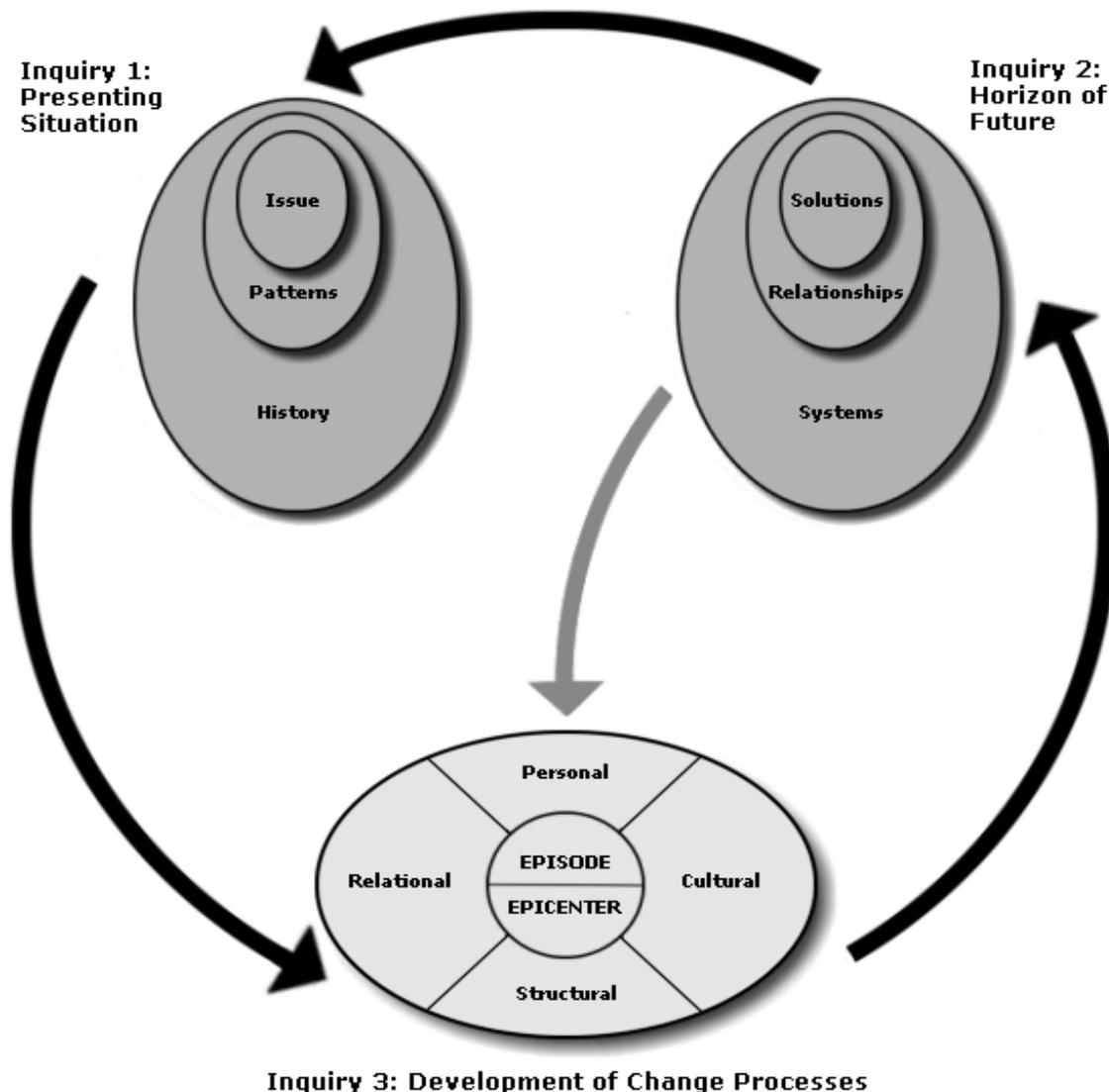
Inquiry 1: The Presenting Situation

The first point of inquiry is the presenting situation, the conflict episode that provides an opportunity to look both at the content of the dispute and the patterns of relationship in the context in which the dispute is expressed. This is graphically represented in Figure 1 as a set of embedded circles or spheres.

A transformational view raises two important questions: What are the immediate problems that need to be solved? What is the overall context that needs to be addressed in order to change destructive patterns? In other words, transformation views the presenting issues as an expression of the larger system of relationship patterns. It moves beyond the "episodic" expression of the conflict and focuses on the relational and historical patterns in which the conflict is rooted.

Put another way, presenting issues connect the present with the past. The patterns of how things have been in the past provide a context in which the issues in a dispute rise toward the surface. But while they create an opportunity to remember and recognize, presenting issues do not have the power to change what has already transpired. The potential for change lies in our ability to recognize, understand, and redress what has happened, and create new structures and ways of interacting in the future.

Inquiry 2: The Horizon of the Future

The second point of inquiry is the horizon of the future, the image of what we wish to create. It asks us to consider what we would ideally like to see in place.

However, this is not simply a model of linear change, in which there is movement from the present situation to the desired future. While the presenting issues act as an impetus toward change, the horizon of the future points toward possibilities of what could be constructed and built. It represents a social energy that informs and creates orientation. Thus, the arrow points not only forward to the future, but also back toward the immediate situation and the range of change processes that may emerge. This combination of arrows suggests that transformation is both a circular and a linear process, or what we will refer to here as a *process structure*.

Inquiry 3: The Development of Change Processes

The final major inquiry is the design and support of change processes. This broader component requires that we think about response to conflict as the development of change processes that attend to the web of interconnected needs, relationships, and patterns. Because the change processes should address both the immediate problems and the broader relational and structural patterns, we need to reflect on multiple levels and types of change rather than focusing on a single operational solution. Change processes must not only promote short-term solutions, but also build platforms capable of promoting long-term social change.

Taken as a whole, this big picture provides a lens that permits us to envision the possibilities of immediate response and longer-term constructive change. It requires a capacity to see through and beyond the presenting issues to the deeper patterns, while at the same time seeking creative responses that address real-life issues in real time. However, to more fully understand this approach we need to explore in greater depth how platforms for constructive change are conceptualized and developed as process structures.

Process Structures: Platforms for Transformation

We come now to the operational side of transformation. The key challenge is how to support and sustain a platform with a capacity to adapt and generate ongoing desired change while at the same time responding creatively to immediate needs. To engage this challenge we have to think about platforms as process structures.
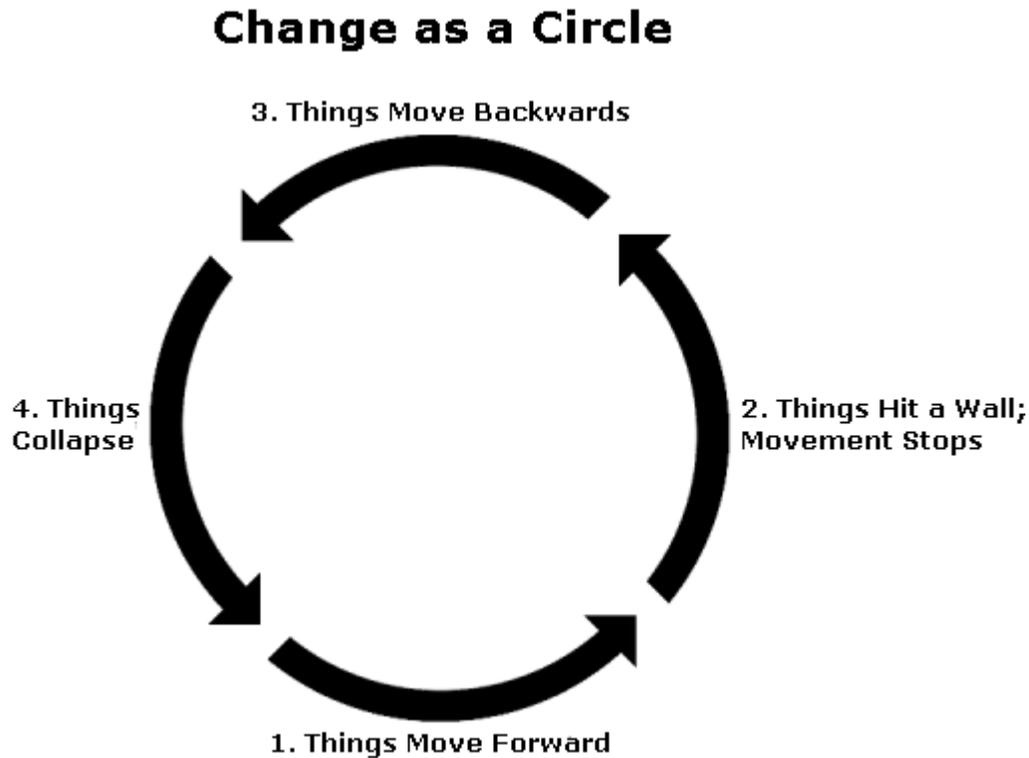
In modern physics, process structures are natural phenomena that are dynamic, adaptive and changing, and yet at the same time sustain a functional and recognizable form and structure.[3] Margaret Wheately refers to them as "things that maintain form over time yet have no rigidity of structure."[4] The two terms that make up this term, "process" and "structure," point to two interdependent characteristics: adaptability and purpose. Transformational change processes must feature both of these characteristics. They must be both *linear* and *circular.*

Conflict transformation is a circular journey with a purpose.

In simple terms, linear means that things move from one point to the next in a straight line. It is associated with a rational-logical understanding of events in terms of cause and effect. However, in the social arena, events are likely moving along broad directions not always visible from a short-term perspective. In this arena, a linear perspective asks us to stand back and take a look at the overall direction of social conflict and

the change we seek. It requires us to articulate how we think things are related and how movement is created. Specifically, it asks us to look at the patterns of interaction, not just the immediate experience, and understand the changes in these broad patterns.

Circular understanding suggests that we need to think carefully about how social change actually develops. This notion of circularity underscores some defining elements of transformational change processes. First, it reminds us that things are connected and in relationship. Second, it suggests that the growth of something often "nourishes" itself from its own process and dynamic. In other words, it operates as a feedback loop. Third, and most critical to our inquiry, an emphasis on circularity makes it clear that processes of change are not unidirectional. Figure 2 represents change as a circle, featuring four experiences common to those in the midst of a difficult conflict.

Change as a Circle

3. Things Move Backwards

4. Things Collapse

2. Things Hit a Wall; Movement Stops

1. Things Move Forward

1. There are times when we feel as if desired change is happening. Things move forward and progress, and what we hope to build seems to be in sight.
2. At other times, we feel as if we have reached an impasse or "hit a wall." Nothing is happening or all pathways forward seemed blocked.
3. Sometimes we feel as if the change processes are going backwards, and what has been achieved is being undone. In worst-case scenarios we hear language like, "In a single stroke, years of work have been set back." Common to the change process is the feeling that we are "swimming against the tide" or headed upstream.
4. Finally, we sometimes feel like we are living through a complete breakdown. It seems as if everything is falling apart and collapsing. These periods tend to be deeply depressing, and are often accompanied by the repeated echoes of "we have to start from ground zero."

All of these experiences are integral parts of the change process and provide us with some important insights about change. First, no one point in time determines the broader pattern. Rather, change encompasses different sets of patterns and directions. Second, we should be cautious about going forward too quickly. Sometimes going back may create more innovative ways forward, and falling down may create new opportunities to build. Third, we should be aware that life is never static and that we must constantly adapt.

Figure 3 represents a simple process structure, which features a web of dynamic circles that create an overall momentum and direction. One might think of this as a rotini, a spiral made up of multi-directional internal patterns that create a common overall movement. It features both the purpose associated with linearity and the feedback loops associated with circularity.
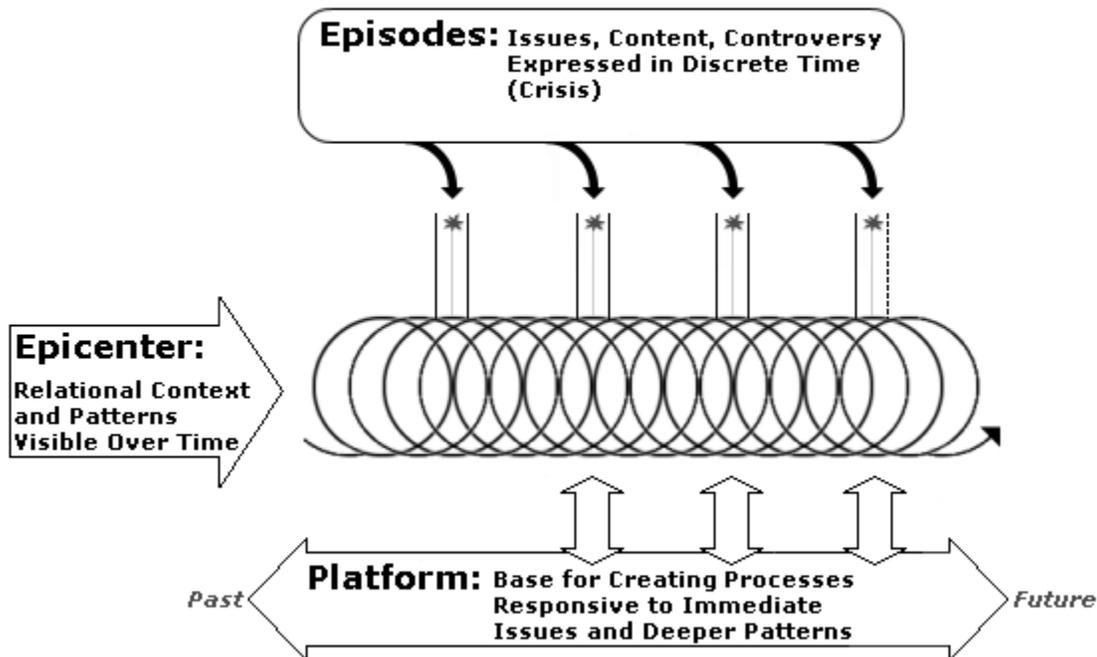
A Simple Process Structure
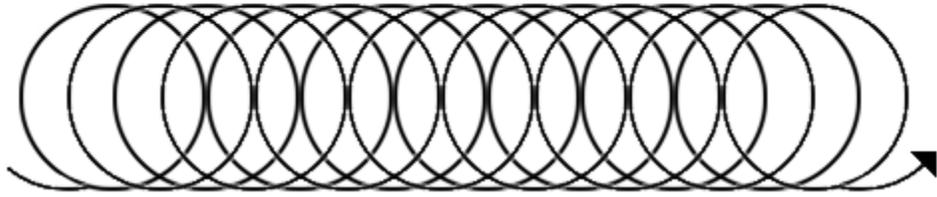
The key to create a platform for transformation in the midst of social conflict lies in holding together a healthy dose of both circular and linear perspectives. A transformational platform is essentially this: The building of an on-going and adaptive base at the epicenter of conflict from which it is possible to generate processes that create solutions to short-term needs and provide a capacity to work on strategic long-term constructive change in systemic relational context.

We can visualize this idea in Figure 4 by adding to our process-structure the rising escalation of conflict episodes. In order to understand a transformational platform, we need to visualize the idea of an on-going base from which processes can be generated. The escalation of conflict creates opportunity to establish and sustain this base. From the transformational view, developing a process to provide a solution to the presenting problem is important but not the key. Central to transformation is building a base that generates *processes* that 1) provide adaptive responses to the immediate and future iterations of conflict episodes, and 2) address the deeper and longer-term relational and systemic patterns that produce violent, destructive expressions of conflict.

Transformational Platform

Episodes: Issues, Content, Controversy Expressed in Discrete Time (Crisis)

Epicenter: Relational Context and Patterns Visible Over Time

Platform: Base for Creating Processes Responsive to Immediate Issues and Deeper Patterns

Past

Future

In other words, a conflict-transformation platform must be short-term responsive and long-term strategic. The defining characteristic of such a platform is the capacity to generate and re-generate change processes responsive to both immediate episodes and the relational context. It is in this way an adaptive process-structure, one that can produce creative solutions to a variety of problems.

Practices For Transformational Strategies

In earlier sections, I described conflict transformation as a set of lenses that combine to create a way to look at social conflict and develop responses. Here I explore how to make this framework applicable by outlining several core practices that are useful in addressing social conflict from a transformational approach.

Practice 1: Develop a capacity to see presenting issues as a window

A transformational approach relies on a capacity to see the immediate situation without being overwhelmed by the demands of presenting issues, the urgency that pushes for a quick solution, and the anxieties that often develop as conflict escalates. The pursuit of broader transformational goals requires us to look beyond the immediate problems and to see these issues as a window. Just as we look through the glass, focusing our attention on what lies beyond the window, we look through the immediate issues to discover the relational context and the underlying causes of conflict. This is what some authors have called the capacity to see the difference between content of a conflict and its emotional and relational context.[5]

Practice 2: Develop a capacity to integrate multiple time frames

Approaching the immediate situation as a window also involves the ability to think about change without being constrained by a short-term view of time. This is not to say that short-term perspectives are never appropriate. The key is the ability to recognize the needs of multiple time frames and create strategies that integrate short-term response with long-term change. Addressing immediate episodes and broader relationship patterns requires processes with different time frames. Processes that will be effective in one case are not likely to be effective in another. For the transformation-oriented practitioner, the key capacity is an ability to recognize what sorts of processes and time frames may be needed to address the different kinds of change.

Practice 3: Develop a capacity to pose the energies of conflict as dilemmas

Posing conflicts as dilemmas involves shifting from an either/or frame of reference to a both/and frame of reference. In settings of sustained violence, we sometimes face what appear to be impossible decisions that involve outright contradictions. For example, those of us working in relief and aid agencies in Somalia in the early 1990s struggled with choices about where to put our energies and responses when none of the apparent options seemed adequate. Should we send food and relief aid even though we know armed groups will take advantage of it to continue the war, or should we not send food but then feel helpless about the enormous humanitarian plight? Far too often how we framed our questions limited our strategies. Framing choices in rigid either/or terms made it difficult to handle complexity.

A shift in thinking emerged when we reframed our questions to reflect the legitimacy of different but not incompatible goals. Rather than accepting a frame of reference that posed our situation as choosing between one important goal or another, we reframed the questions in terms of interdependent goals. How can we build capacities for peace in this setting and at the same time create responsive mechanisms for the delivery of humanitarian aid? The formula is this: How can we address "A" and at the same time build "B"? This way of formulating the question creates a capacity to recognize different but interdependent aspects of a complex situation and develop integrative responses. The capacity to reframe conflict in this way enables us to more clearly identify our goals and seek innovative options for action.

Practice 4: Develop a capacity to make complexity a friend, not a foe

In conflicts, especially when there has been a long history of patterns and episodes that were not constructively addressed, people feel overwhelmed. It may seem that that situation is just too complicated, that there are too many things going on to even try to explain it. At times of escalated conflict, complexity describes a situation in which we feel forced to live with multiple and competing frames of reference about what things mean. We are also faced with lots of things happening at multiple levels, between different sets of people, all at the same time. This often leads to a sense of ambiguity, which produces three feelings: we feel insecure about what it all means, we are not sure where it is going, and we feel as if we have little or no control over what happens. This often leads people to seek escape or to find a quick solution.

But in order to constructively deal with complexity, we must make it a friend rather than a foe and recognize its potential for building desired change. One of the great advantages of complexity is that change is not tied exclusively to one thing, action or option. The first key is to trust the capacity of systems to generate options and avenues for change. Second, we must pursue those options that appear to hold the greatest promise for constructive change. Third, we must not lock rigidly onto to one idea or approach. The potential avenues of change generated in complex systems are numerous. Complexity is especially a friend when cycles and episodes of conflict seem to narrow toward the same outcomes every time. It is here that paying careful attention to the multiplicity of options can create new ways to look at old patterns.

Practice 5: Develop a capacity to hear and engage the voice of identity and relationship

We have mentioned time and again the need to look for and see the patterns in the context that underpin the presenting situation. This involves an ability to recognize and then develop response processes that engage the deeper core of the conflict. Two central "root causes" of social conflict are identity and relationship.

Identity is best understood as a relational dynamic that is constantly being redefined. It is not primarily about negotiating an agreement to solve a material problem, but rather is about protecting a sense of self and group survival. While it is rarely explicitly addressed, identity shapes and moves the expression of conflict. At the deepest level it is lodged in the narratives of how people see themselves, who they are, where they come from, and what they fear they will become. It is also deeply rooted in their relationships with others.

A central challenge for transformation is how to create spaces and processes that encourage people to address and articulate a positive sense of identity in relationship to others but not in reaction to them. This can be accomplished in three ways.

First, be attentive to language, metaphors, and expressions that signal the distresses of identity. In order to deal with core issues of identity, one must acknowledge them as issues.

Second, move toward appeals to identity rather than away from them. Acknowledge that the conflict requires a process that more explicitly addresses issues of identity and relationship. Generating solutions to immediate problems is not enough.

Third, design transformation processes as dynamic platforms that create repeating patterns of exchange and exploration rather than produce immediate negotiated solutions.

Three guiding principles that characterize this process of exchange and exploration: honesty, iterative (i.e. repeating and cumulative) learning, and appropriate exchange.

First, we should work toward the creation of spaces where people feel safe enough to be deeply honest with themselves and others about their fears, hopes, hurts and responsibilities. Honesty reflects parties' sense of safety and builds trust.

Second, we must create multiple points of access and repetitive examination for addressing identity. The negotiation and definition of identity is a complex process that requires processes of interaction with others as well as inner reflection about self. Identity work is not a one-time decision-making process, but rather an ongoing learning process about self and other. This requires an iterative platform for addressing identity concerns within a framework of broader constructive change.

Third, appropriate exchange calls attention to the need to design work on identity in ways that respect people. Beyond direct face-to-face dialogue, there are many ways that learning and deepening understanding about identity and relationship can occur. This includes dialogue-as-music, dialogue-as-sport, and dialogue-as-shared-work to preserve old city centers, parks and mountains. All of these may do more than traditional dialogue to advance learning and understanding.

In addition, it is important to be attentive to people's perceptions of how identity is linked to power and the definition of the systems and structures that organize and govern their relationships. This is particularly important for people who feel their identity is eroded, marginalized or under deep threat. When addressing identity-based concerns, processes must strive to understand the roots of people's perceptions and address the systemic changes needed to assure access and respectful participation.

Conclusions

May the warmth of complexity shine on your face.
May the winds of good change blow gently at your back.
May your feet find the roads of authenticity.
May the web of change begin!

The lenses of conflict transformation focus on the potential for constructive change emergent from and catalyzed by the rise of social conflict. Because the potential for broader change is inherent in any episode of conflict, from personal to structural levels, the lenses can easily be applied to a wide range of conflicts.

A key advantage to this framework lies in its capacity to think about multiple avenues of response. To use our earlier comparison, we suggested that transformation builds on and integrates the contribution and strengths of conflict-resolution approaches. A transformational approach inquires about both the specifics, immediately apparent in the episode of conflict, as well as the potential for broader constructive and desired change.

Clearly there are arenas in which transformation is limited and a quick and direct resolution of the problem is more appropriate. In disputes where parties need a quick and final solution to a problem and do not have a significant relationship, they typically appeal to negotiation and mediation. In such cases the exploration of relational and structural patterns are of limited value. For example, a one-time business dispute over a payment between two people who hardly know each other and will never have contact again is not a context to explore a transformational application.

However, in cases where parties share an extensive past and have the potential for significant future relationships, and where the episodes arise in an organizational, community or broader social context, simple resolution approaches may be too narrow. Though they may solve the immediate problems, they miss the greater potential for constructive change. This is even more significant in contexts where there are repeated and deep-rooted cycles of conflict episodes that have created destructive and violent patterns. In such cases, avenues to promote transformational change should be pursued.

Conflict transformation places before us some big questions: Where are we headed? Why do we do this work? What are we hoping to contribute and build? Increasingly, I am convinced that those in the alternative dispute-resolution field and the vast majority of people and communities who wish to find more constructive ways to address conflict in their lives were drawn to the perspectives and practices of conflict resolution because they wanted change. They wanted human societies to move from violent and destructive patterns toward the potential for creative, constructive and nonviolent capacities to deal with human conflict. This means replacing patterns of violence and coercion with respect, creative problem-solving, increased dialogue, and nonviolent mechanisms of social change. To accomplish this, a complex web of change processes under-girded by a transformational understanding of life and relationship is needed.

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[1] This essay is an excerpt from John Paul Lederach's book "The Little Book of Conflict Transformation, published by Good Books, 2003. Conflict Research Consortium graduate student Michelle Maise condensed the 70+ pages of material in the original draft of that manuscript (with John Paul's and the publisher's permission) into this essay.

[2] See *Preparing for Peace* (Syracuse University Press, 1995) and *Building Peace* (US Institute of Peace Press, 1999).

[3] See Margaret Wheatley's discussion of this in reference to learning organizations in *Leadership and the New Sciences*, San Francisco: Barrett-Koehler, Publishers, 1994.

[4] Wheately, 1994:16.

[5] See Hocker and Wilmot's discussion of content and relationship in *Interpersonal Conflict* or Edwin Friedman's discussion of anxiety, emotional process and symptomatic content in *Generation to Generation*.