

## *Chapter 1*

# **Disarticulation and Conflict Transformation**

## *Interactive Design, Collaborative Processes, and Generative Democracy*

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This essay is intentionally very broad. An incredible number of detailed and nuanced approaches to conflict and community decision-making have been developed by both scholars and practitioners. Some of these are research-based; more are conceptually persuasive and supported by testimonials. Even a casual look at the website of the National Coalition of Dialogue and Deliberation (NCDD.org), for example, can be overwhelming. Add to this the various books on conflict, public participation, and community development and we might think that our toolbox is very full. But despite the variety and the many, many, places of success, I believe that they share commonalities that limit quality interventions and central problems in a growing number of contexts. Transformational approaches to conflict can benefit from an understanding of the contemporary context in which conflicts occur and, in light of that, a more radical understanding of communication. Specific techniques of intervention in conflicts or in community attempts at making creative, mutually satisfying, choices can make little sense or be misunderstood without an understanding of the larger issues.

For the purposes here, a transformative approach is required where multiple parties are in an interdependent situation, and where attempts at finding a mutually satisfying way forward has not been achieved in using standard community-based conflict resolution and decision-making processes. These are sometimes referred to as “wicked” problems.<sup>1</sup>

Mutual decisions in these contexts require designed processes that generate high degrees of decisional creativity, deep commitment to the decisions, active voluntary compliance, and customization to local circumstances and needs.



The essay will begin by showing the general social conditions making problems like this more likely. Contemporary social conditions are characterized by very rapid change, high degrees of pluralism and interdependence, and increased mediation of experience. These will be briefly developed. Together these conditions fundamentally change how communication functions and dysfunctions. Mutually beneficial social choices require communication concepts and practices that match the particular social circumstances and human goals of their time and place. This requires moving beyond the communication concepts and practices developed by different people in different circumstances with different problems.

Next the essay will show that many widely shared communication conceptions and practices, collectively referred to as "liberal democracy," often fail to take into account these relatively new conditions, contribute to a "tragedy of the commons," and create public frustration with democratic processes. Many of these same conceptions are embedded in the multitude of common approaches to conflict situations and public decision-making processes; hence, investigating the relation between larger theories of communication and specific designed processes for transforming conflict is essential. "Unwitting consent," where manufactured identities, knowledge, and positions are taken on as individual's own, is often not addressed in public involvement and deliberation processes and even the most advanced form of participatory decision-making. Without addressing the prior social production problem, even approaches that focus more on creativity like IDEO's very useful *Toolkit* can be limited where conflict transformation is needed.

A "generative" democracy built around a relational constructionist understanding of communication will be presented as an alternative to the more psychology-based liberal democracy that is common today. This will provide an analytic frame to demonstrate the complex "political" "positionality" present in many conflicts today, and how even fairly small issues evoke "culture wars" and reproduce larger power relations and politics. The types of contestations arising in conflict and multiple stakeholder decision-making situations will be detailed. And, the analytic will be used to show how complex positionalities become articulated together in tight bundles hiding the multifaceted nature of conflict behind mobile contentious facets.

Conflict transformation requires a systematic disarticulation of the unwitting consent in embedded positionalities, and interactional productivity, whereby positionings themselves may be opened to reformation through carefully designed processes reclaiming "otherness" and contestation. The essay ends by providing examples of how such designs work. Transformation is ultimately achieved by the pull of the productivity of interaction, rather than the push of arguments. In an argument framework, the presumed force of the better argument wins, or retreat to common ground happens. In an

interaction framework, difference is accepted rather than embraced as the origin of freedom.

### SOCIAL CHANGES AND NEW DEMANDS ON COMMUNICATION CONCEPTIONS AND PRACTICES FOR CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION

Dominant communication concepts and practices arise as a society's best attempt at meeting public goals and solving social problems in relation to the historical circumstances of their formation. Such concepts, and practices, aid individuals in paying attention to important things in their world and provide norms for appropriately interacting and making decisions with one another. These concepts are often highly scripted and institutionalized. Unfortunately, as circumstances and needs change, such scripts may become less useful and, in fact, may lead to repetitive failures. Also, because they were formed at particular times in relation to particular needs, particular dominant concepts and practices may meet some people's needs far better than others. The world we live in has changed faster than our dominant communication concepts and practices, and these concepts are increasingly less likely to lead to mutually beneficial decisions.

I will characterize our new context in the following way. Rapid change and pluralism undermine the naturalism of reproduced community-based values, identities, knowledge, and so forth, giving rise to the possibility of creative invention through communication. But many people and communities experience these changes and the new context as deeply threatening. The fear and insecurity leads to increased defensiveness and a tightening of systems of cultural reproduction. Increased interdependence, however, makes a sealed world and re-segregation difficult, and creates endless places of choices having to be made together. In many places this leads to vicious cycles and escalating cultural politics, and often terrorism and violence. Further, the increased mediation of experience removes groups from a concrete external world that might be literally a common ground and enables various confirmation biases. And, this mediation enables sponsorship of experiences, hence distance sources of money and power enter deeply into private experience production and, by extension, into interpersonal and community conflicts that otherwise would have more narrow local dimensions and possibilities of resolution. Growing income disparity, high degrees of unemployment, loss of control over much of one's life, and the endless production of fear, put these processes on steroids. Allow me to elaborate just a bit on these conditions, before developing the implication for concepts and practices of communication.



*Pluralism* as a term draws our attention to the increasing contact between people with different values, cultural heritages, and ways of living. Communities around the world have always been different with different experiences and life goals. However, in the past, mountains, rivers, oceans, and time separated groups from each other. Contemporary society is now characterized by the ongoing interaction of people previously separated. Sometimes people are radically different from one another and the existence of the difference may be threatening to the deep sense that *my* world is *the* world. The illusion of a single culture, of *my* culture being *the* culture, is shattered by the contemporary need to take into account peoples who think differently.

The consequences of pluralism are accentuated by increasing degrees of *interdependence*. Individuals and groups are thrown into contexts where they find themselves dependent upon people around the world who are not like them. Continually growing economic interconnection is visible and immediate with unprecedented international trade and investment. Today we are reminded daily that we all live “downstream” from each other. Pollutants and disease know no national boundaries and rarely remain local problems. Everyone has an interest in what the other does. One of the most discussed implications of the failure to perceive interdependence is called the *tragedy of the commons*. The 2008 banking crises stands as one of most recent and ready at hand examples where the practices of a small community making decisions that were momentarily personally beneficial had disastrous consequences for the world economy and the health and well-being on much of the world’s population.

All human experience is *mediated* in that our experience of others, and the world, comes to us through our sense equipment and the various extensions of our senses. Today the ability to see what could not before be seen, record perceptions, and pass these on to others has greatly expanded. A major consequence of this is that people increasingly respond to reports of events, and produced images of events, rather than to events themselves as mediated more simply through their own sense equipment and those around them. Historically most of the important aspects of a human experience were based on events individuals actually saw, or from the reports of a person they knew who actually saw the event occur. Today, most of the things people respond to in life are not directly experienced. Instead, many of our experiences are an outcome of manufactured, promoted, and inevitably partial and slanted productions. The people and institutions preparing news reports and developing technologies connecting people to the world are not neutral. They have vested interests in the stories they produce and in the experiences people have as a result. Despite the variety of perspectives electronically available the system allows a narrowing of perspectives actually received. The growth

of mediation blurs distinction between the real and fiction, and shapes even immediate experience since it produces a way of seen not just a what that is seen. Fear and conspiracies are easy to spread; uncertainty, doubt and “truthiness” confound knowledge producing and verification activities; and trust and authenticity become themselves social products.

These conditions are not abstract, but are concretely woven into everyday life, and have direct implications for concepts and practices of communication and the interaction designs for transformation in conflict situations. Most of the basic everyday conceptions of communication were developed in a world different from the contemporary one and were designed to accomplish very different ends. In slow changing, homogeneous, independent societies individuals communicated *from* things already agreed upon and experiences already shared. Linear models made sense because distribution and signaling already shared meanings was central. Distribution and fidelity of reproduction could be central concerns. We could reasonably talk about joint fact finding when conflict existed. Understanding, separation, accepting universal rights, and when necessary voting could be central to community decision-making. In fast changing, heterogeneous, interdependent societies, communication has to construct shared meanings. Temporary, for the purposes at hand, consensus regarding personal identities, social rules, knowledge and values has to be endlessly worked out rather than assumed as existing. People need to be able to talk about—negotiate and collaboratively create these things—rather than talked *from* them as if they were fixed and shared. Because of this, the interest in communication turns to being more focused on the social processes before the mouth than after it. As communication and the construction of experience become more mediated, the nature of these constructions and negotiations become more complex and important. What do I mean and how do I say it, is changed to whose meanings are these that I take as mine, in what ways did I participate in their construction rather than unwittingly consent to them, and what can I satisfactorily produce with the other? And, from a communication professionals’ standpoint, what interaction designs best enable answers to these later questions in contexts often experienced as threatening, fearful, and filled with disadvantage. The insecurity at an existential level, and possible opportunity for growth, both need to be understood.

So what do we do in a world that is opening up and requiring more constant constructing together, and at the same time is producing an insecurity that leads people to close down and avoid risk and growth? One answer rests in developing processes of communication that break the risk/control cycles. New communication conceptions that aid us in making a world together in the face of uncertainty, and insecurity, are needed.<sup>2</sup>



## RETHINKING COMMUNICATION AND DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES

Given these fundamental changes, unsurprisingly, many people throughout the world are increasingly frustrated with meetings, community choices, and political processes, and, thus, they increasingly question the ability to make good decisions together. Fear plus frustration, and lack of faith in institutions, is not a good combination. Many individuals have become angry, cynical, and have dropped out. Cynicism itself is both an intended as well as unintended social product. Others have become even more self-interested and non-cooperative. Some even doubt the ability of the great democracies to survive. And, even the most optimistic people wonder if our processes can be productive in an anticipated future world with even greater conflicts and interdependency, with crumbling infrastructure and depleted resources, with ecological crises and migration, religious fundamentalism, with debt at all-time highs for businesses, governments, and individuals, and with partisanship stifling public responses. Many worry about the future. In some ways we have a design(ed) failure. From a communication perspective, intervention in many conflict and community decision-making contexts requires innovative interaction designs.

All human interaction has a particular *architecture* either by design or default. The architecture includes the presence of particular institutionalized scripts and episodes providing rules, expectations, and norms as well as physical contexts that together guide choices of how to act, and how to interpret the choices others make. Different processes of interaction have different internal logics, propensities, and "affordances."<sup>3</sup> They have system tendencies or embedded biases to end up with specific types of outcomes—that is, particular interaction forms have a non-required but propensity to develop in certain directions. With an architecture, some things are made easier and some things more difficult.

Everyday interaction has both designed and default properties. Most people have complex and actively used conceptions of what good communication is, and how communication should be used in relationships and decision-making processes. These are usually based in their *native theories*. While often these *native theories* emphasize expression and transmission of messages, in real environments, interaction is often more complex than this.

In natural environments, people evoke multiple ways of resolving differences. Six common architectures exist, for example, each make easy certain forms of communication and a way of making decisions. They can be characterized as follows: *Debate*: Strategic, adversarial talk; aimed at winning through the better argument; decision by professional judgment or voting. *Discussion*: Cooperative or co-determinative but more often adversarial talk;

aimed at expression of positions and opinions, clarification of points of view, everyone having a say; decision by concession or voting. *Deliberation*: Cooperative, often co-determinative talk; aimed at determining what is true based on rationality, fact finding, appealing to common warrants and procedures, and removal of power dynamics; decision by emerging consensus and agreement. *Negotiation/bargaining/mediation*: Cooperative or co-determinative but often strategic talk; aimed at tension reduction and rational assessment of parties' best rational interests in light of constraints and limited options; decision by agreement. *Dialogue*: Cooperative and co-determinative talk; aimed at understanding the other in their own unique life context, acceptance of difference; decision by appealing to common grounds and desire to get along. *Collaboration*: Cooperative and co-determinative talk; aims at creativity to overcome apparent conflicts by reframing and enlarging available options through avoiding positioning and favored means of goal accomplishment and focusing on larger outcomes and interests; decision by emerging consensus around new options of mutual benefit.

Sometimes each of these is carefully designed, taking into account the affordances coming from physical environment features, timing, participants and so forth. Other times not. The job of communication professionals is to encourage intentional thinking, about design and to innovate designs for our contemporary context. While communication professionals can improve on each of the common social designs and these improvements can often have social benefits, our contemporary context and need for higher levels of creativity, commitment, compliance, and customization, puts pressure on developing more collaborative designs. At the least, more attention has to be given to the relation of social conditions, interaction design affordances, and desired outcomes.

The concern with interaction design can be described as: A focused attention to creating conditions favorable to quality interactions. Design involves intentionally managing elements of time, place, participants, form, and content. It answers the question: Is this the moment, participants, physical attributes of location, specific ways of talking, topical issues that best assure a mutually productive interaction, efficiently and effectively meeting the needs and goals of participants, and increasing the likelihood of positive future interactions? In other words, are the right people in the right room at the right time talking, in the right way, about the right things?

But design in any community is not just a best practice, but has to be seen as a praxis—the practice is theoretically informed, usually implicitly, rather than through explicit consideration. A design cannot exist and solicit participation without engaging the native communication theories present in the community, grounding their own concepts of appropriateness and justice and wider institutional practices, policies, and laws. And it cannot be



disconnected from a professional's own best knowledge regarding communication, especially when that is in conflict with native theories. This, I believe, even though many may consider this a frustratingly abstract move. We cannot talk about design without talking about theories of democracy, and how they intersect with theories of communication.<sup>4</sup>

### LIBERAL DEMOCRATIC THEORY AND INTERACTION DESIGN

An explicit look at the assumption regarding communication in conceptions of democracy tells us much about why interaction processes around conflict, dispute, and decision-making are designed the way they are, and why they do not match well with the contemporary context. The discussion here is, of course, brief and over-simplified, but characterizes the difficulty and a path forward. Basically I will argue that eighteenth-century concepts of the person and communication are deeply embedded in our everyday and professional practice around community decision-making. These are contradicted by contemporary communication theory and easily demonstrated as inadequate within the contemporary social context of "wicked" problems.

The most basic and encompassing native theory of human interaction in the United States and many other societies is generally referred to as *liberal democracy*. Liberal democracy is a broad collection of preferred interaction designs that share key characteristics. These characteristics are formalized in the U.S. Constitution, governmental decision-making processes, and the most common justice systems. They informally guide many of the common practices of arguments, debates, and discussions in many different types of meetings and other non-governmental human interactions. As a design it helps us do some things very well but also has characteristic flaws and *embedded biases* which may make it more difficult at times to work productively together, especially with increased change, pluralism, interdependence, and mediation.

All interaction designs have to work with four basic questions central to democratic theory. These are answered differently based on larger concepts of human beings and their interaction. (1) What is the nature and source of human experience, knowledge and meaning? (2) How shall group and individual differences be presented or represented, or in the case of democracies, how shall reciprocity be assured? (3) What shall be the preferred talk processes when we have differences, and how should the conflict around difference be adjudicated? (4) How shall we deal with the problem of scale since decisions often involve large populations?

Liberal democratic conceptions and practices are based on particular answers to these four questions: (1) The autonomous individual is seen as the

origin of perceptions, thoughts, and feelings. Communication study focuses on the expression of these. (2) Freedom of speech and speaking forums are considered to be adequate and adequately available for equable participation in decision-making. (3) Persuasion and advocacy are seen as the preferred mode of interaction when differences are present leading to decisions by voting when differences and conflict remain. (4) Representation is used to overcome problems of scale. Representation may be based in lottery selection as in juries, elections as in representatives, or distribution as done in representing interests in community planning.

While always some complex exists, most of these assumptions are implicitly enacted as everyday people work with conflict and community decision-making. Town hall-style meetings, juries, political debates, etc., show some of the purest elements of such assumptions turned into designs. Professionals working with transformative processes recognize some of the limits in these assumptions or the way they are actualized, and tweak the designs most often to remove various forms of "irrationality." Various forms of joint fact finding, *délibération*, consensus building, dialogue, and collaborative forms of talk, and systematic stakeholder engagement provide a multitude of design improvements. But rarely do any of these look critically at the very first assumption—the site of meaning production—and its consequences. Each of the design improvements will tend to help when pluralism, interdependence, and the mediation of experience are relatively low and needed solutions already exist but are likely to be less helpful when these social conditions are high and high degrees of creativity are needed. Allow me to spend a moment on each assumption and the difficulties.

#### Assumption One Problems: The Site of Meaning Production

If one assumes that experience arises spontaneously in the individual, then the liberal democratic designs work well. Acts of communication express inner states and represent personal identities. And, understandably, much of the professional study of communication has similarly focused on the psychological development of thoughts, feelings, and attitudes, and treats communication as the processes by which these are transported to, or influence, others. When meaning is thought of as being relatively fixed and possessed by people, problems of communication are most often conceptualized as an understanding issue with "irrationality" as a psychological one.

But this assumption is the central assumption that contemporary communication theory challenges, and contemporary social conditions deny. The basic concern is that if the processes of experience formation are not open and equable, then speaking, even free speech, only expresses meanings formed by others, a problem authors of the U.S. Constitution never considered.



The presence of this challenges the adequacy and efficacy of democracy. If we accept a version of constructionism, the growth of the strategic process of experience and identity production poses problems for this fundamental democratic conception.

One of the shames of our time is that those undermining democracy are often using more sophisticated communication models than those supporting it. They understand that publics can often be more easily culturally managed than persuaded. Liberal democratic models can become their friends in disguise. Certainly the flood of scholars doing work in cultural studies has helped describe the depth of the problem. Unfortunately, they have often been better social critics than designers of local interactions to reclaim democracy. As might be expected the other three communication assumptions in liberal democracy follow from the same eighteenth-century conceptions of the first.

#### Assumption Two Problems: The Assurance of Reciprocity

If the site of meaning is in the individual, it follows that assuring the right to free speech meets the ethical and practical needs for reciprocity, and hence the legitimacy of democratic decisions. But even from a liberal democratic conception, more attention has been given to the defense of freedom of speech than to the preservation of meaningful places to speak, and equal ability to produce and distribute powerful messages. In the United States, the Citizen United case (granting commercial speech first amendment protection) merely carries existing inequalities of access to an extreme. The new social media have enabled some new possibilities of reciprocity, but not necessarily better or more fruitful discussions. Freedom of expression is essential because good decision-making requires that all relevant perspectives should be known by all. Freedom of speech was thought to be adequate to assure reciprocity but often it does not. It is a necessary but not sufficient condition for it.

But the problem for democracy in the contemporary context is even deeper if we accept social constructionism. Present interaction processes do not foster the development of all relevant positions. Freedom of expression neither specifies the right of being heard, nor guarantees the invention and expression of all possible positions. Freedom of speech becomes the freedom to express meanings constructed by others, rather than to freely and openly construct them with others.

#### Assumption Three Problems: The Preference Model of Conflict Adjudication

Conflict is a natural part of social life made more intense by pluralism and interdependence. All social systems have ways of resolving differences.

Liberal democracy has its own design preferences, generally organized *adversarial talk* with debate being the idealized version, and the courtroom with the two polarized attorneys making their cases as a particular purified version of it. One enters the talk situation with an *interest* or an already formed *position*. The discussion or debate becomes increasingly polarized around these positions and the options for solutions become increasingly narrow. Facts are collected to be used to support existing positions. And, since, final responsibility for the decision tends to rest with others, the arguments made usually play to an audience. Generally, the assumption is that in adversarial talk, the best argument will win out and those who think differently will be persuaded. But because conflict often cannot be settled by argument and debate, either voting or some form of bargaining, negotiating, or compromising is used to settle disputes.

Discussions often operate with a faith that if everyone engages in self-interest expression, good collective decisions arise. Many today doubt that this is occurring; rather we seem to often have special interests winning against the good of the commons and frequent inability to reach decisions. Many consider this to be a design flaw of liberal democracy and the logic and the forms of interaction encouraged by it. As Ben Barber argued, liberal democracy was better designed to keep people safely apart than productively together.<sup>5</sup>

#### Assumption Four Problems: Overcoming Scale

Representation is liberal democracy's concept to overcome problems of scale. Every decision-making event evokes concerns with who is to be part of the interaction. Our moral concern with reciprocity, similarly, always directs us to consider who should be included. Democratic societies are generally considered to be too large and complex to have direct democracies. The solution in liberal democracy was representation. And representation has filtered into most governmental and non-governmental decision-making contexts.

Representation, however, does not necessarily solve problems of scale even if we put aside for a moment the larger issue of constructionism. Two difficulties are central. Representation does not assure that the differences are present that are needed to push toward creativity. Are the differences that matter—the differences that make a difference—represented rather than simply socially designated/produced groups? And representation is always beholden to external groups and known positions that, themselves, are not able to grow in the interaction. A representative who is always looking over his or her shoulder (or to the next election) to see what specific external groups think, is unlikely to engage open communication.



## GENERATIVE DEMOCRACY AND INTERACTION DESIGNS

If constructionism is accepted, democracy exists or does not in the systems of construction rather than expression. A critical interest in interaction has to focus on the interaction processes by which meanings came to be, rather than simply on the manner of their expression and coordination. Treating experience as socially constructed provides an opening for this critical concern. If meanings are socially constructed, they are always constructed within real historical conditions, hence relations of power are always embedded within constructions. In contrast to liberal democracy, accepting constructionism can support a generative democracy, a democracy based on the potential productivity of interaction. Generative democracy (1) describes experience as relationally constructed, (2) uses strong sense of reciprocity as a normative ideal for the distribution of expression turns, (3) prefers *collaborative talk*, and (4) overcomes scale by the preservation and presentation of meaningful differences. Since it is in many ways the most difficult, most of the time here will be spent developing a relational constructionist concept of experience.

### Experience Production and a Politically Attentive Relational Constructionism

A generative democracy sees all constructions as *relational constructions* achieved with real conditions of power difference. Hence I develop this as a politically attentive relational constructionism (PARC). I will be brief here since I have developed this in greater detail elsewhere, and borrow liberally from them.<sup>6</sup>

At the most basic level, any creature's experience is a relational product of (1) a *particular way of encountering* the world with particular sense equipment and directions and (2) an *encountered* that is brought to a specific determination in the encounter. This is a co-constitutive relationship. Relational constructionism explores the moments of co-constitution and the conditions making particular constructions possible rather than accept the claimed objective and subjective productions as given.

Experience is an outcome of an engaged subject—the phenomenological “floating I” or positionality—being in the material world. Subject engagements, the ways of encountering, are historically produced and socially shared ways of engagement as comportment, projects, language, and so forth, hence are routinized, sedimented, and institutionalized. People are recruited or interpellated into these ready-at-hand modes of encounter and construction processes. When this occurs, new subject positions and the indeterminacy of the encountered may not arise. The contest of possibilities is lost to reproduction and conflict suppression. This is developed in many places as the

processes of systematically distorted communication and discursive closure.<sup>7</sup> *Otherness* and *difference* are essential to producing anew, rather than reproducing the culturally preferred.<sup>8</sup>

A subject engagement is always realized in relation to something, the “what” that is encountered. For analytic purposes, experience can be considered a constellation of six different types of relational constructions each based on the “what” that is encountered as a subject engagement moves in the world. The “what” can be described as (1) the inner world, one's own body, (2) the world of specific others, (3) the social world of general others, (4) the external world of elements and events, (5) the past-future vortex, and (6) the presence of limited resources and interdependence.

The relational constructions arising in the encounter of a subject engagement and that encountered make claims *about* the encountered and claims *on* the person embodying the subject engagement. Each of these six kinds of claims could be disagreed with or contested in interactions with others, either in interpersonal interactions or large public disputes. Because they were created under conditions of power inequality, can be disputed, and have implications for our choices together, we can say that each type of claim provides for a distinct “politics.” The six politics can be summed as follows:

The *politics of authenticity*: What feelings are present and possible? What are the action and interpretive practices required for such feelings to arise? How are feelings and the production of feelings distributed and institutionalized?

The *politics of identity and recognition*: Who are the people in this interaction? What are their implied rights and responsibilities with these identities? How strongly do individuals identify with that identity? What would challenge that identity? How are identities institutionalized?

The *politics of order*: What behaviors, actions, and ways of talking are considered appropriate? What norms and rules support these? Do individuals consider these to be legitimate and applicable to them? How are rules and norms institutionalized?

The *politics of truth*: What do members think is true? What are their warrants for the truth claim? What are their processes of dispute and adjudication? How is the knowledge relevancy determined? What are the practices of knowledge formation and distribution, and how are they institutionalized?

The *politics of life narratives*: How does the world work for them? What would a good and beautiful future look like? What do they want for themselves in it? What is their preferred or expected way of getting there? What are their favorite stories showing how things work? How is the sense of how things move from the past to the future institutionalized?

The *politics of distribution*: What do they consider to be the right and appropriate way to distribute resources? What is just to them? How are systems of distribution and justice institutionalized?



Each politics does not stand alone, but are articulated or co-joined together in a particular way. *Framing* is the discursive process by which *articulation* occurs. No necessary relations exist across particular claims. They are orthogonal. But in the frame and articulation the relations become more or less oblique.<sup>9</sup> Think of a child who has a fast red car. Color and speed have no particular relationship but if children have articulated them, no one may want the yellow car. Saying that yellow is pretty may have little interest if speed is salient, and especially so if beauty is also articulated with red and fast.

Hence, the action on each of these has more or less implications across the others. Challenging a knowledge claim, for example, has implications for identity, and so forth. In conflict, one "face" of the configuration or a particular politics is most often salient but the intensity of the conflict rests in the implications for the hidden politics in other relational configurations. Thus surface and interpretive implicature conversations are always being had at once. In the simplistic example, for a child to want the yellow car, first requires a disarticulation of color and speed, this is a discursive, relational constructionists' way of understanding the mechanism behind framing that has been much discussed in the conflict transformation literature. In using it to analyze conflicts I believe that it better accounts for the politics and construction of frames and gives insight into how particular reframes work or do not. Most community cultural changes occur around reframing or dis- or re-articulating the relations among the political configurations. The relations among the politics can be mapped and leverage point discovered.

"Difference" may form a contestation of a claim within each of these politics or of the articulatory relations among them. Hence "difference" while it can be rejected is also the only way to provide alternative claims and the possibility of disarticulation, that is, the possibility of interaction productivity. The articulatory relations always reflect the transformation of orthogonal relations into oblique ones. Disarticulation reclaims the independence of claims and can reduce the number of issues and overall affective force.

Let me turn to an actual community choice situation, one not too complicated but still I will characterize a bit to help the relations stand out. I have worked with STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) education for over a decade. One of the frustrations of granting agencies and other change agents has been the presence of significant evidence and pilot programs demonstrating the superiority of particular educational experiences and yet the failure of the ability to inculcate, scale, and sustain these practices in education institutions. This has led to a call for institutional transformation, and is often described as a "culture" issue. "Culture" as a term is used in these circles as a catchall to account for all the underlying and often unspecified reasons that knowledge/innovation distribution and rational arguments do not lead to change.

Listening to the many arguments around a department policy and reward structure to promote particular teaching practices, I was always struck by the depth of entrenchment. This is clarified by looking at the complex relational positionings available to faculty members and how they are bundled and evoked. What could be conflicting knowledge claims around the relation of educational experiences and extent of learning is of course much more than that. For example, faculty arguments for interactive problem-centered classroom discussions is not only a knowledge question but has implications for the place of affect, faculties' identity as scientists, concepts of authority and respect, academic freedom, the viability of social science research, narratives of progress, and the relation of objectivity to concepts of fairness and justice. Each of these does not stand alone but they are articulated together. Unsurprisingly a typical faculty meeting designed as discussion or debate instantiating each person's expression as representing a "real" self, cannot describe nor unpack these social formations. The formations may be unwittingly consented to but the consent is strong and shielded.

The moves to get faculty acceptance at some level certainly reflect an understanding of this. For example, the turn to the popular use of "evidence-based practices" tries to reclaim the identity of a scientist who appropriately should follow the data, but at the same time poses all sorts of questions of what can and cannot be measured, what/whose goals should anchor what is measured and so forth. Generative democracy approaches ask a different question than is typically asked. The question is not whether this or that approach gets adherence to a priori goals, but whether a "better" conversation has been initiated. An unexpected conversation not subject to discursive closures, thus enables more openly chosen reconstructions away from that normally unwittingly consented to.

For example, in a recent faculty discussion of a more integrated science curriculum, the issue of academic freedom was raised. The ensuing discussion was predictable. Some discussion was made of faculty rights, questions were posed as to the limit of those rights, and so forth. The discussion became quite different after a different difference was added. What if academic freedom was redefined in terms of "freedom to" rather than "freedom from"? A different conversation is now possible. How can a community aid faculty members' ability to do things that they cannot now do? How did academic freedom come to be constructed in the way that it was? What purposed did/does that construction accomplish? When, where, and to what end is it used? What limits it most today? In these spaces creativity rather than compromise and trade-offs occur.

Allow a further brief example, taking the principle to a non-university community. The various issues surrounding climate change are often polarized, which means in the terms here that two tightly articulated formations



exist wedding particular constructions across the six political claims. The presentation of more scientific knowledge with expressions of certainty tends to activate the bundle rather than contest it. A framing in terms of risk probability can have other consequences. For example, if a person who rejects the scientific 90 per cent certainty that the existing models are essentially correct is asked his or her own level of certainty regarding the science, he or she may commonly answer if pushed say by 5 per cent. If the further question is asked, if you felt that a one in twenty chance existed that a storm would flatten your house would you buy insurance and take mitigating actions, what percent of your income would you use in protection? If one in a hundred chance? Now the question is not what is the form of acceptable knowledge or feelings about university scientists, but the relation of risk assessment and level of action. Disarticulation has begun.

By acknowledging such formations and the strength of articulation, a generative approach works to provide designs that make such interactive productivity possible. Generative democracy begins with a concept of experience that acknowledges and helps detail what is brought to the table, to begin with an awareness that unwitting consents to a bundle of claim and awareness that designs failing to acknowledge this contribute to discursive closures and systematically distorted communication. But the mere demonstration of this is rarely consequential. Consequences come with the reformulation of other aspects of democratic design.

### A Stronger Concept of Reciprocity

Liberal democracy, in assuming meaning as person-centered, uses concepts of free speech and various systems of distribution of speaking turns to assure reciprocity. Understanding relational construction shows that a stronger sense of reciprocity is necessary if we are to produce free and open production (rather than simply expression) of meaning.

Free and open production of claims requires a strong *contestation of* rather than a *disagreement with*. Many different literatures have discussed the "preparation," "intention," or "attitude" side of this and others, the structural parts. What is required is a meeting of the general conditions of the ideal speech situation and complementarily meeting the specific concrete other. Our relation to the other is governed by the norm of complementary reciprocity: each is entitled to expect and assume from the other forms of behavior through which the other feels recognized and confirmed as a concrete, individual being with specific needs, talents, and capacities.<sup>10</sup> Essentially one has to be prepared to accept a difference as different rather than cover it up with existing formations and a "difference" has to be sufficiently powerful in its presence to "demand" a new formation. Extensions of Gadamer's conception

of *genuine conversation* as well as Levinas' strong concept of *otherness* provide some conceptual understanding of how a generative reciprocity can be achieved.<sup>11</sup> Interaction designs have to achieve two conditions: an engagement that allows the world and meaning to unfold in front of it rather than trying to control or direct, and a difference which challenges the ordinary pre-understandings brought to the interaction. In these, the ordinary conversation is disrupted with the possibility of a formative, productive one. The direct presence of a concrete other being able to vividly display seems to be critical especially in the face of highly mediate productions often present in community conflicts.

### The Preference of Collaborative over Adversarial Forms of Adjudication

Professionals working with community decision-making have long promoted collaborative over adversarial forms of talk. This approach was well summarized by Gray<sup>12</sup> years ago. They have had to work against the various liberal democratic interaction designs that favor forms of strategy and argumentation and its hope that good decisions follow the force of the better argument. Essentially collaborative talk suggests that the focus on positions and winning creates various different problems for multi-stakeholder decision-making. Collaborative talk, in contrast, shows that a multiple goal or outcome focus can allow cooperative information seeking and discovery of new ways for mutual achievement. Here I want to take this further to suggest that collaborative talk is necessary not just to overcome existing positions, but cuts across all six politics and the fixed positionings and constructions that preexist in each.

Understanding relational construction helps by showing how adversarial talk reproduces meanings constructed by others rather than producing a kind of interaction where one can be active in producing their own meanings *with* others. Productive communication is a particular responsiveness to the outside. A collaborative encountering difference is essential for creativity and for overcoming relational constructions reproduced through us and is necessary for us to make our own choices.

### The Issue of Scale

Representation has been the liberal democratic answer to the difficulty of having all community members participate in difficult decisions. This is made even more difficult in an increasingly interdependent world since the impacted communities can be very large. The problems of representation for creativity have already been discussed. A generative democracy conception



show how representation focuses on categories of people creates limits and how these can be overcome by the assurance of contesting differences being present. The focus is on differences that might not be present in any particular group or may intersect with groupings in complex ways with them only being activated in particular discussions. The creativity necessary for mutual accomplishment is only possible with maximum contestation and freedom to reconstruct. Generative democracy thus focuses less on stakeholders and their interest and more on the existence of social formations and the differences needing to be concretely present to contest them.

### CONCLUSION: GENERATIVE DEMOCRACY IN PRACTICE

The goal of the interaction design for the complex community conflict and decisions within contemporary social conditions is to overcome various forms of systematically distorted communication, and discursive closures, which sustain unwitting consent to six political formations, and enable free and openly chosen new joint formations. I wish to conclude by showing a kind of generic application to community decision-making processes. Generally the attempt is to make the things of direct contention, enabling new and more open conversations with a focus on initially going slow, to be able to go fast.

The interaction design begins with question for who, where, and how long should the group meet. Many literatures exist on these issues. Generally the type of contestations and reformations a politically attentive relational constructionism-based generative democracy requires is a smaller group, more privacy, and more time than is typically allocated. The power of "difference" to pull creativity requires the concrete presence of difference, acceptance and safety, and ability for work with complexity. Many community discussions focus on input characteristics than favor size, public visibility, and economy. Legitimacy is achieved through these. But in the long run they may not give very creative answers and be very time consuming involving many repetitive meetings and dealing with dissent and non-compliance afterwards. Regarding problems that require transformation, if these could work then they already would have. A more generative approach gains legitimacy through pulling the public with new quality answers.

The second part of design is attending to the actual processes of interaction. To be brief but specific, let me show a fairly typical list of the conversations involved in a community decision-making process but with a generative democracy tweak.

Conversation 1: Getting the Design Real—Ground Rules. The point is to design a process where collaborative talk is fostered through developing and accepting basic process rules like confidentiality, non-interruption, asking

questions first, dealing with power differences, and withholding judgment. These should manage the common interactional problems anticipated especially around common practices of discourse closure and systematically distorted communication thus enabling discussions of identity and experience formation normally precluded.

Conversation 2: Assuring Concrete Difference and Reciprocity—Expressing Positions and Dialogue. The key here is allowing the expression of existing positions and formations across the six claims. The focus is on confirming these as real and the acceptance that a good rational person can think and feel that. The sharing of personal experience, moments of formation, and seeking the richness and complexity of each helps make the "differences" concrete and not easy to discount. The desired end is "getting it" in its realness and complexity. Each can trust that others could speak well on behalf of each other if asked. Accepting complexity and dispersion rather than seeking common ground is central to a successful conversation.

Conversation 3: Instantiating Collaborative Talk—Problem Transformation. The focus here is on transforming stated positions, wants, preferred means of goal attainment, and experiences through surfacing underlying ends, interests, outcomes, and objectives. This conversation is designed to overcome unwitting consent to productions brought into the room in each claim area, and turn what appears to be limited resources and zero-sum games into expanded options. This is a commitment that through creativity all appearing to be conflicting objectives can be met though overcoming fixed formations.

Conversation 4: Joint Fact Finding. Once the objectives have been established, the group is able to determine what information would be necessary to make a plan to successfully accomplish them. Here the move is away from judgments, interpretation, and explanations that tend to evoke the larger articulated relations and closer to observations, intuitions, and feelings that help disarticulation. The point is not to disqualify erroneous claims but qualify ones present. Difference is not to be reduced but held only asking what it would take to believe this together. Knowledge is progressively complexified and situated.

Conversation 5: Inventing Options. The key assumption is that the participants can invent something better in the room than anything members can bring into the room. The focus is on achieving all the even apparently conflicting outcomes by, at times, returning to "transformation" to look at the stated desired outcomes. The group uses brainstorming or similar process where stakeholders present possible ways of accomplishing some of the outcomes and a chaining of ideas from all participants begins. Well designed, this can be essentially a disarticulation-rearticulation process. Attempts are made to combine ideas into more and more emergent plans that accomplish the different objectives.



Conversation 6: Reaching an Agreement. Participants work to develop some agreement and consensus around proposed solutions. If consensus is not occurring, then we need to make adjustments to the solutions. The goal is to produce consensus on a course of action that may accomplish multiple and even conflicted goals. Ultimately, three criteria need to be met: Is it desirable (meets our hopes and dreams)? Is it feasible (it could actually be put into play)? Is it viable (economically/socially/ecologically sustainable)?

Conversation 7: Implementation. This is a process where the group moves forward with a plan (or plans) and considers what would be necessary for the proposed to be accepted by the wider public and put into place. This is the strategic part of the process where implementation is key, and has to take into account social formations present in publics and explicit processes of dis- and re-articulation with them.

As a practitioner, these are introduced and transitioned around with much more subtlety than such a list suggests. My attempt in presenting it is to both keep a process as close to common practice as possible, and tweak it in ways that show how acceptance of relational constructionism can make the process more productive.

## NOTES

1. R. Ackoff, "Systems, Messes, and Interactive Planning," portions of Chapters 1 and 2 of *Redesigning the Future* (New York/London: Wiley, 1974).
2. W. B. Pearce, *Making Social Worlds*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007.
3. M. Aakhus, "Technocratic and Design Stances toward Communication Expertise: How GDSS Facilitators Understand Their Work," *Journal of Applied Communication Research* 29, no. 4 (2001): 341–71.
4. A much more developed earlier treatment is in: S. Deetz, *Democracy in an Age of Corporate Colonization: Developments in Communication and the Politics of Everyday Life* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992).
5. B. Barber, *Jihad Versus McWorld* (New York: Times Books, 1995).
6. S. Deetz, S. "Power and the Possibility of Generative Community Dialogue," in *The Coordinated Management of Meaning: A Festschrift in Honor of W. Barnett Pearce*, ed. S. Littlejohn (Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2014), 217–34; S. Deetz and E. Eger, "Developing a Metatheoretical Perspective for Organizational Communication Studies," in *Handbook of Organizational Communication* 3rd ed., ed. L. Putnam and D. Mumby (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage), 27–48; J. McClellan and S. Deetz, "Sustainable Change: A Politically Attentive Discursive Analysis of Collaborative Talk," in *Discourse Perspectives on Organizational Communication*, ed. J. Aritz and R. Walker (Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2012), 33–58.
7. S. Deetz, *Democracy in an Age of Corporate Colonization: Developments in Communication and the Politics of Everyday Life* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992).

8. S. Deetz and J. Simpson, "Critical Organizational Dialogue: Open Formation and the Demand of "Otherness," in *Dialogue: Theorizing Difference in Communication Studies*, ed. R. Anderson, L. Baxter and K. Cissna (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2004), 141–58.

9. E. Laclau and C. Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, trans. W. Moore and P. Cammack (London:Verso, 1985).

10. S. Benhabib, *Situating the Self: Gender, Community, and Postmodernism in Contemporary Ethics* (New York: Routledge, 1992); S. Deetz, D. Cohen and P. Edley, "Toward a Dialogic Ethic in the Context of International Business Organization," in *Ethics in International and Intercultural Communication*, ed. F. Casmir (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1997), 183–226.

11. A. Pinchevski, *By Way of Interruption: Levinas and the Ethics of Communication* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2005).

12. B. Gray, *Collaborating: Finding Common Ground for Multiparty Problems* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1989).

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## Chapter 2

# Indigenous Principles and Communication Strategies

## *Extending Lederach to Design Research for and as Conflict Transformation*

Laura E. Reimer

The literature regarding the relationships and engagements between communication and conflict transformation is an expanding and exciting contribution within peace and conflict scholarship. This chapter presents a tested research paradigm formed on the triad of conflict transformation, Indigenous research principles, and communication. The design contributes new ways for understanding the complex relationships communicated within the stories people tell, especially at the local level. When research is designed as conflict transformation, people find agency in sharing their stories and communicate how they have made sense of their experiences. The model presented here was tested originally in 2011 at a local level, and encourages the peacebuilding qualities of unreserved and empowered communication through the integration of Indigenous research principles, storytelling, and conflict transformation principles as both the method and a goal of research designed for and as conflict transformation.

Rarely does one immediately associate research methods and analysis with communication and as direct transformational approaches to conflict. While Lederach said that conflict transformation is both "a way of looking as well as seeing,"<sup>1</sup> it can also be conceived as a method and a goal for research. The triad of Indigenous principles, conflict transformation, and communication are linked by the fundamental concept of relationships and, together, offer new ways of transforming conflict by recognizing the complexities within which people develop, acknowledge, confront, explain, and transform conflict in and through the stories they tell, especially at the local level. According to Indigenous scholar Shawn Wilson, "methodology is simply the building of more relations."<sup>2</sup> The model presented at the end of this chapter makes provision