

## **Crisis $\Lambda$ Vs. Crisis $\Omega$ : An Explorative View**

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*The word conflict conjures up negative feelings for many of us. While conflict may enhance interaction and social cohesion, it also has the ability to polarize individuals or groups. This paper will provide an explorative view of the word “conflict” and will show how we can shift from a crisis mode into crisis growth. This paper is not empirically based but is the product of the authors’ own experiences, reflections, personal and professional growths. It is also a culminant of the authors’ collective exposure to and resolution of conflicts on a national, international, inter-cultural, legal, and personal level.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

The authors desire to make it clear that this paper is based purely on theory and is devoid of empirical and scientific data. We have written this paper in simple colloquial language to impress upon the reader that the scope of this paper is provide (minus empirical data) a more common sense, day to day approach, and interpretation of the issues surrounding conflict. The views offered by us are in no way meant to imply that they have been tested and tried in a research setting.

We humans have an inherent need to communicate, whether it is verbally, non-verbally, by using symbols, body language, or gestures. When communication and messages are distorted, misunderstood in their context, meaning, interpretation or application it leads to conflict. According to Rummel (1976), it is through conflict that humans learn about themselves and the world in which they live. Organizational psychologist Morton Deutsch begins with the basic premise that any conflict is either cooperative or competitive. He also says that cooperation easily turns into competition but competition does not easily become cooperation. Cooperative conflict assumes that when one party helps themselves they help the other party. It makes sense that this type of co-operative conflict is marked by open discussions and a free exchange of information. The conflict will tend to be constructive. On the other hand competitive conflict exists where a party believes that whatever they do to help themselves they will end up somehow hurting the other party. Exchange of information is slight or non-existing. If the conflict is competitive it will tend to be destructive (Coltri, 2010). According to Lederach (2003), conflict affects our physical well-being, self-esteem, emotional stability, capacity to perceive accurately, and spiritual integrity.

Indeed conflict, whether competitive or cooperative, is necessary for growth of a species, culture or even a story. A plot is defined as the building of tension or conflict between antagonists leading to a climax and movement toward an anticlimactic conclusion. No successful Hollywood film is without its principle conflict with its characters driven towards a climatic dissonance ultimately leading to harmonic

resolution (happy ending). Without this critical conflict, no real story can be told. Likewise, without conflict constructive learning, whether through dynamic real time learning or from post-deconstructive learning, often does not occur. Even if it does, it is without the cogitative thought that accompanies collaborative fact finding and brain storming toward solutions. In fact, solutions garnered through the filters of shared experiences, including seeming failures, leads to more permanent, farther reaching, and broader in scope results. Eclectic output results from collaborative crisis circumspection and management.

When negotiating within stressful environments, it is often the more successful approach to move the involved parties towards collaboration. Even under extreme stress, such as in a marital dissolution involving children, bringing the warring parties to a mutually beneficial vector point by emphasizing the child's benefit is paramount can suspend the personal and emotional crisis points sufficiently to cooperate in formulating a uniform plan for the best interests of the child. This movement from individual crisis to an issue involving an innocent third party (or wider social crisis) moves the conflict from a micro to macro level of involvement and changes the perception of the crisis as personal to one that can now be seen by the combating parties as an external crisis that needs mutual cooperation to resolve - and the common grounds for overcoming the obstacles to that solution - namely a common good (innocent child's best interests). Interestingly, the approach advocated by the authors appears to be an accepted methodology within the California court, at least as it appertains to marital dissolution involving minor children. While consenting adults have some freedom to choose a more self-interested approach and are often guided by less than altruistic motives in seeking court redress, once children are involved, there is a public policy to put the interests of the children first, thereby sanctioning a collaborative approach to the conflict - at least with regards to the combatants minor children.

## **CULTURAL ASPECTS OF CONFLICT**

Human communication expresses four dimensions, namely, physical, socio-psychological, temporal and cultural. The physical context of communication is the tangible or concrete environment in which communication takes place; socio-psychological context includes status relationships amongst the participants; temporal context includes the time and day as well as the time in history in which the communication occurs; and cultural context relies on the beliefs, values, and ways of behaving shared by a group of people (Bram, 1953; Devito, 2003). Cultural mentality is the term used to describe the manner in which a society interprets reality, and is said to be divided into three sectors. The ideational mentality is the spiritual interpretation of reality, where the needs of man are believed to lie in high ideals, and truth is clear and absolute; Sensate mentality relates to physical pleasure, and according to German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, "from the senses of pleasure come all trustworthiness" therefore, sensate culture will emphasize pleasure and will lose its normative values of right and wrong; Idealistic mentality combines the elements of ideational and sensate mentalities (Wahrman & Denisoff, 1975).

Each culture has its own unique aspects that may be misunderstood or misapprehended by those unfamiliar with them. Added to this is the confusion stemming from language barriers. Therefore, when dealing with conflicting situations that are culturally varied, flexibility appears to be a successful strategy. The natural ability to interpret someone's unfamiliar and ambiguous gestures the way that person's compatriots would to create a fruitful collaboration in situation where cultural differences play, is known as Cultural Intelligence (CI). A key factor that influences behavior across cultures is the means by which people influence others and use of power in relationships. Cultures can be egalitarian which have relatively permeable status boundaries, and empower their people to resolve conflict for themselves. Some cultures are hierarchical where the status boundaries are fixed, and in these cultures, people of lower status are expected to respect those of higher social status (Earley & Mosakowski, 2004; Zartman, 2010). For example, because Asian cultures emphasize the importance of saving face, Asians are less apt to use blame and rejection as conflict strategies (Devito, 2003).

The importance of integrating knowledge and an open-minded attitude and putting them into adaptive and creative practice in everyday communication is emphasized by flexible intercultural communication (Toomey & Chung, 2005). Holding difference as a constant, mindful listening, consideration of

fairness, and a win-win outcome need to be our focus when dialogue is started, because each culture exhibits both functional and dysfunctional aspects (Kelley, 1967; Toomey & Chung, 2005). The purpose of communication is to discover, to relate, to help, to persuade and to play. When an individual engages in communication with another, he or she learns about her/himself as well as others, and the individual's self-perceptions are as a result of what he/she has gathered about him/herself from others. We have strong motivations to establish and maintain close relationships with others, and there are those whose roles allow them to consistently help others whether as apparent, a teacher or counselor, to name a few. We also spend a great deal of time persuading others to see our points of view along with play based communication (Devito, 2003).

Further, appropriateness, effectiveness, adaptability and creativity are the main skills needed to manage multiple meanings in a communication exchange. Appropriateness is assessed by understanding the underlying ethics, ideals, social roles, expectations, and social scripts that govern the communication interaction. Effectiveness is the degree to which the parties communicating can find mutually shared meanings and integrate goal related outcomes. Adaptability is the ability to change to meet the specific needs of the communication as it happens. Creativity is the ability to combine the best of both cultures into a synergistic solution or conclusion (Toomey & Chung, 2005). Each cultural conclusion derived from its crisis management.

## **TYPES/LEVELS OF CONFLICT**

Intrapersonal, interpersonal and intragroup conflicts are the types of conflicts that will be discussed in this paper. Intrapersonal conflict is that which one engages with one's own self, such as an individual who is a teetotaler partaking drinks in a social circle though he/she does not want to do so. Interpersonal conflict, typically between two individuals, is seen in the work environments, and can be caused by individuals who are unable to find a mutually beneficial or working relationship. Also seen is a dearth of differed opinions and experiences, enhanced by lack of common ground and personalities that may not be on the same wave-length. Examples of interpersonal conflict are found in domestic relationships, house-mates or team mates. Intragroup conflict can occur as a consequence of lack of resources, coherence, communication and power dynamics within the group. It may involve multiple groups. There are three levels of conflicts. Latent conflicts are underlying tensions that have not fully developed and have not escalated into a highly polarized conflict. An example would be changes in relationships in which one party is not aware of the seriousness of the breach that has occurred. Emerging conflict is where the dispute is acknowledged, however a workable cooperative negotiation has not developed. Manifest conflicts are those where the parties are engaged in an active and ongoing dispute, may have started to negotiate and may have reached an impasse (Coltri, 2010; Rummel, 1976).

The business climate, domestic or international, is fraught with crisis. From resourced management, employee relations, government regulations, human frailties, conflict management is an integral part of the management of a company's future success and even survival. Successful conflict management is the outcome of successful crisis circumnavigation. By the methods utilized, positive team-building and moral can be achieved; competitive often leads to resentments and anti-moral behavior. Every transaction, every social interaction contains potential crisis. Crisis is often imagined, which makes the choice of perception contained in the opportunities that may result from the crisis critical.

## **FUNDAMENTAL ATTRIBUTION ERROR**

In 1958, Heider postulated the Attribution Theory which basically explores how people interpret events and relate them to their thinking and behavior; and that behavior can be explained in two ways by attributing it to a person, or attributing it to a situation. Later, researchers like Kelley (1967) and Jones (1972) expanded on this theory to develop a theoretical structure that bifurcates the behavior attributes into two parts. When a behavior's cause is attributed to the individual self, personality, abilities, and traits of the person involved, it is called internal attribution; if the cause of the behavior is attributed to

environmental constraints, other people's actions, and properties of the situation, it is external attribution (Heider, 1958; Jones & Nisbett, 1972; Kelley, 1967; Reeder, 1982). Additionally, according to Kelley (1967) the Covariation model proposed by him states that the effect is attributed to one of the causes which co-varies over time, and it considers three major types of information to make an attribution decision and to observe a person's behavior. (a) The Consensus information refers to how people will respond to similar stimuli in similar situations, leading to a high (their reactions are shared by many) or low consensus (no one or only a few people share the reactions). (b) The Distinctiveness information explores how a person responds to different situations, and the distinctiveness is high if a person reacts differently in different situations, and the distinctiveness is low if the person reacts similarly in all or most of the situations. (c) The Consistency information is where the response of a person to different stimulus and in varied situations remains the same, leading to high consistency (Kelley, 1967).

Also known as correspondence bias, Fundamental Attribution Error (FAE) describes the proclivity for observers to credit people's behavior to internal or dispositional factors and to downplay situational causes, and that observers tend to explain behavior in terms of the actors internal disposition rather than the external situational factors (Amabile, Ross & Steinmetz, 1977; Gilbert & Malone, 1995; Kazdin, 2000). Fundamental attribution error is said to occur when the perceiver does not have full knowledge or background information of that situation, and the person will then depend on dispositional factors in order to explain and understand the particular event (Reeder, 1982; Gilbert & Malone, 1995). FAE has merits and demerits. On the positive side, FAE gives people a sense of control over their social environments; on the negative side, observers will feel indifferently if they believe a person's behavior is a direct result of his/her internal dispositions. While FAE may also lead to misattribution in particular situations, it can also serve as a useful heuristic (Reeder, 1982). Dynamic approaches to crisis management include a constant attentiveness to the changing environment as conflict actors move from one perception to another based on internal and/or external attributes - inputs.

## **CRISIS MODE**

When individuals are in the crisis mode, they are not receptive to resolving the conflict. While avoidance of conflict or the individuals representing the conflict is a possible strategy, it is not going to be productive in the long run, as the tension that created the disagreement will remain and hinder a participatory environment. In some situations, there are other forces obstructing the path to resolution. There are three categories of impediments to resolving conflicts, such as the forces that create independent motives against resolving conflicts; the forces that complicate the situation and make it harder to find a solution, and forces that reflect or produce perceptual distortions (Coltri, 2010, p. 38). When individuals are in the crisis mode, they are not receptive to resolving the conflict. In some events, there are other forces obstructing the path to resolution. Let us explore why and how conflict remains stagnated for extended periods of time. While engaged in conflict, if the feuding individual (s) is experiencing these feelings below, the conflict remains suspended in a state of agitation.

Many crises do not involve direct human conflict, but are the result of external factors affecting the environmental framework wherein humanity exists. Water and air quality, as well as species extinction, and even global warming are examples of bi-products of human activity which left unchecked, evolve into crisis. The conflict between adherents to change and those who advocate stasis represent the transmutation of failure to act that arises to a critical imperative to act. Under threat of destruction or annihilation people tend to take a collaborative approach to crisis management. Heroism is an outcome of crisis management and often displays the positive outcome possible from collaborative crisis management modalities. Cowardice may be another form as it promotes a self-serving resolution of a conflict - confrontational crisis management. Fear invokes response and in a crisis that response may manifest in the so-called "fight or flight" response. Either may be a successful short-term conclusion to the crisis, but the motive behind the response utilized, if for self-preservation or whether it is for a common good, may determine whether or not the long-term result is positive.

Communication involves symmetrical and complimentary transactions. Symmetrical and complimentary transactional thinking: when two individuals mirror each other's behaviors, it is known as symmetrical transaction or relationship. They feed off of each other's negative attitudes and expressions which will continue to flame the situation. In communication that is complimentary, the behavior of one serves as a stimulus for the complimentary behavior of the other, and the differences between the parties are maximized, one becomes superior to the other (Devito, 2003). While engaged in conflict, if the feuding individual (s) may be experiencing these feelings below, the conflict remains suspended in a state of agitation.

Confrontational; conniving/conspiring to gain an upper hand, where each party vies to win the conflict; being overly critical of the intentions, motivations and attitudes of others

Revenge or retribution seeking; negative regard for the opponent; reactionary; rejection

Isolation: prefer not to engage anyone; feels alone and abandoned but is reluctant to reach out to anyone for fear of being talked out of the conflict; general demeanor of irritability and annoyance.

Shame and humiliation at the prospect of losing the fight; has a vested interest in winning this conflict, and is not about to concede, because concession is seen as a sign of weakness and failure.

Increased negative regard for the others; hostility and resentment are expressed.

Severance from the conflict/parties (I don't care attitude).

The Great Philosopher Socrates believed that opinions and ignorance ultimately lead to wrong and faulty understanding. He professed that through knowledge, the existence of only one truth is attainable; this truth can be shared in a way to capture a morals true nature or essence (*Encyclopedia Of World Biography*, 2004).

## **CRISIS GROWTH**

“Let us never negotiate out of fear, but let us never fear to negotiate” John F. Kennedy. To experience growth also means the individual has to be receptive to transforming power and the possible changes stemming from this acceptance. Moral truth is based on actions, postulated Immanuel Kant. He further opined that the successful creation of moral truth needs people to act from duty and that motives determine value of an action (Rosenstand, 2009).

Conflict has an impact on the situations and tends to change things. These changes can be personal, relational, structural and cultural. When the changes are cognitive, emotional, perceptual, and spiritual aspects of human experience, the change is said to be on the personal dimension. In the relational dimension, the issues of emotions, power, and interdependence, and the communicative and interactive aspects of conflict are central. 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 basic human needs and provide access to resources and decision-making. 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 (Lederach, 2003).

John Lederach coined the term conflict transformation in the early 1980s because of his belief that “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.” Given that conflict and change are a part and parcel of human life, it is only fair that we attempt to understand the bonds that create this relationship (Lederach, 2003). So what do we do to lead us to the path of growth? For starters, reaching to find mutual goals and outcomes would help. To allow ourselves to be open to the communication that may be headed our way is another step. The great philosopher-monk Nagarjuna (C150-250) opined that things derive their being and

nature by mutual dependence and are nothing in themselves. Negotiation, done in good faith, is the noblest of crisis management tools. When a mutually beneficial outcome is the determined goal, the result will be probative and truthful learning through managed conflict. Chaos is a state of being, and a positive crisis management modality promotes positive results through a continual resolution of the conflict that is natural in moving chaotic impulses to stable responses. Even opposed ideals will have common ground on which to build common rapport while each may still resolve specific crisis on an individual basis, but it will be without the resultant harm to the other party that is naturally found with combative and self-interested approaches. Open communication, honest exchange of information and goals will more often lead to common understanding and collaborative efforts at mutual beneficial outcomes.

When a conflicting individual is in the growth mode, the feelings, views and experiences may be different. The individuals therefore may want to seek other forms of resolution, should they accept these definitions of the word Crisis (not necessarily in this order prescribed below).

**C**ommunication for common ground, leading to the path of compromise; the conflicting parties tend to look constructive/considerate/collaborative approaches to create change in perspectives.

**R**eflective, respectful reconciliation and communication; recognize that others are only human; the individual will begin to accept the transgressions of the others as mere human failings

**I**nclusion and integration of the other party's feelings and needs, accepting and acknowledging the other party has feelings is by itself a big step, because when we attribute human qualities to others, it creates an additional responsibility in us to perhaps consider their feelings and emotions.

**S**ympathize with the others, we may have empathy for the conflicting individual but not necessarily sympathy, these two are not always interchangeable. Empathy enables one to comprehend what the other is feeling, on an intellectual and emotional level, where as sympathy is feeling sorry for that person. Thus, if we are leaning towards a growth period derived from the conflict itself, we may extend our sympathy to the others for their losses as well. As we are aware, each conflict has wins and losses on both sides, though the quantitative and qualitative factors may be different.

**I**-messages can be a means of transforming a conflict situation by arousing empathy leading to individual transformation, where one takes responsibility for the issue at hand and de-escalates the conflict; an inner change, self-actualization that allows us to see beyond the conflicting horizons, and view the individual as an individual and not merely as an enemy combatant. You refrain from attacking the person, but instead seek resolution of the conflict. You expect the best in others.

**S**uspending evaluation and judgment of others; seeking symbiotic strength. Most human beings tend to be judgmental, whether due to environmental, transcendental, cultural, biological or other proclivities. To experience transforming power of the conflict growth, it is imperative that we abstain from scaling Mt. Olympus and seat ourselves in judgment of others.

What we bring forth to the tableau also makes a difference, our attitude can set the stage for disaster or jubilation. Poet John Keats (1795-1821) captured it well when he said "I would sooner fail than not be among the greatest." This is the essence of human strength and valour in wanting to try something new, unique and clearly uncharted. To embark on a journey of transformation is by no means facile, the challenge lies not in the ease of the process but in starting the process itself, the strides one needs to take to reach out to the other conflicting individual can be stressful. Human egos are pendulous in nature, what is a sign of self-actualization and growth by some is seen as a sign of weakness and concession by others. This linear and narrow interpretational difference can preclude one from seeking change. We are capable of detecting and deciphering the goodness in those around us.

## Comparative Table at a Glance

Crisis Mode	Crisis Growth
<b>C</b> onfrontational; conniving/conspiring to gain an upper hand, where each party vies to win the conflict	<b>C</b> ommunication for common ground, leading to the path of compromise; Constructive/considerate/collaborative approaches to create change in perspectives.
<b>R</b> evenge or retribution seeking; negative regard for the opponent; reactionary; rejection of others' views	<b>R</b> eflective, respectful reconciliation and communication; recognize that others are only human
<b>I</b> solation: prefer not to engage anyone; feels alone and abandoned but is reluctant to reach out to anyone for fear of being talked out of the conflict; general demeanor of irritability and annoyance.	<b>I</b> nclusion of the other party's feelings and needs
<b>S</b> hame: feel humiliation at the prospect of losing the fight	<b>S</b> ympathize with the others' situation; acceptance of possible compromise or concession
<b>I</b> ncreased negative regard for the others; hostility and resentment are expressed.	<b>I</b> -messages; individual transformation; recognize that he/she has the power to make a change
<b>S</b> everance from the conflict/parties (I don't care attitude)	<b>S</b> uspending evaluation and judgment of others; seeking symbiotic strength

## CONCLUSIONS

The nineteenth-century German idealist, George Hegel saw man as an actor in the drama of history. Actors express opposing ideals and values and argue passionately that each is right. This process of competing idea systems he called Dialectical process, it refers to the competition of two opposing forces and the emergence of a new force from this clash. It starts with one force called a thesis, and is challenged by another called the anti-thesis, resulting in a third force, a synthesis that incorporates both. With each conflict, a synthesis is reached, and a better form of knowledge is born. Hegel thus welcomed conflict, because he felt progress would come only through struggle. Change is imminent, which means that the cause of the change is in the unit that is changing. Early sociologist August Comte believed that human beings exhibited natural tendency to move from an uncomfortable point of stress known as disequilibrium, to a point of harmonious plenty, called equilibrium. He believed in the face of adversity, people improved (Wahrman & Denisoff, 1975).

Survival of the species may depend on how we approach the harmonization of self-interests (the ego and the id) and those of the society we live in or aspire to create. The bunker mentality, wherein we tend to look at survival as a personal success and divine right, is in opposite to Darwinism on a species level. Humans are societal creatures, needing the security and eclectic assistance of fellow man in developing the tools on which our survival depends. Mastering conflict management tools may include the ability to suspend the ego or to subvert it to the greater need of the species in order that even the individual may survive. Individual contributions to the collaborative team effort or brainstorming that is required to gain mass support of game changing ideas demands that the individual effectively rises above or attains a level of enlightenment in order to have personal self-esteem not dependent on constant reinforcement from outside stimuli. Me, me, me cultural attitudes tend to be counter-productive when large-scale conflicts

arise. Suspension of personal feelings, while difficult, may ultimately have a biological imperative genesis: the common good outweighing the good of the individual when it comes to survival of the masses. This tends to be true in geo political and industrial environments. Alfred Lord Tennyson (1809-1892) so poignantly said, Knowledge comes, but wisdom lingers. The wisdom gained from successfully resolving conflicts should thus serve humankind emancipate ourselves from being in a crisis mode for any other conflicts arising later, at least such is the hope of the authors anyways.

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