

Chapter 5

Transforming Communication for Peace

Beth Fisher-Yoshida

Introduction

Communication is the most important means of interaction between people. It is a critical component of our relationships with others, and the quality of these relationships creates our social worlds. In destructive conflict situations, the quality of our communication is poor, it destroys our relationships and it escalates and spreads conflict perpetuating this destructive cycle. In order to change these relationships and our social worlds from conflict to peace, we need to transform the nature of the communication we have with others.

This chapter will discuss transforming communication to create and sustain peaceful social worlds through better quality relationships. We will look *at* the communication we use, specifically the content and process of the communication itself, rather than *through* communication as a means to an end. The focus will be on a dialogic approach to communication, which shifts the direction from unilateral to bilateral, and will be addressed at a variety of levels including interpersonal, intergroup, societal and global. We will look at factors affecting communication, our roles and the dynamics we create, the types of messages being communicated and the influence of context and culture on our communication. Conflict impacts those factors and these problems will be identified with suggestions for shifting the tone of the communication from conflict to peace. Finally, the chapter will conclude with ideas for sustaining the transformed communication necessary in an environment of peace.

B. Fisher-Yoshida, Ph.D. (✉)
Negotiation and Conflict Resolution, Columbia University, New York, NY, USA
e-mail: bf2017@columbia.edu

Dialogic Approach to Communication

Conflict transformation as a process involves changing the nature of the communication between parties in conflict as they engage in dialogue. This in turn alters the nature of their relationships as they find ways to identify common ground. Communication is made and transformed in relationship and relationship is made and transformed in communication. The term “dialogue” has been used in a number of ways by a number of people and this naming does not imply shared understanding or process (Pearce & Pearce, 2000). In an attempt to synthesize the many voices of scholars and practitioners who comment on dialogue and use a form of it in their practice, some of the common themes are that it is: about deeply listening to each other; joint inquiry in a shared exploration to co-create understanding; temporary suspension of assumptions; deepening of connection and relationship; about our humanity; a space or container in which all of the above can take place (Cissna & Anderson, 1994; Ellinor & Gerard, 1998; Isaacs, 1999; Pearce & Pearce, 2000).

We can think of dialogue as the means to an end or the end in itself (Pearce & Pearce, 2000). Dialogue can focus on the *relationship*, it can be framed as an *event* or it can be thought of as a *context*. If we think of dialogue as being about “relationship,” then it is the process through which better quality communication is made using certain defined criteria, such as moving from hostility, blame and antagonism to one of listening, respect and understanding, being fully present and entering into I-Thou relationships on a mutual level (Buber, 1996). Buberian dialogue refers to having *dialogic communication*. In an I/It relationship the other person is treated like an object and there isn’t regard to that person’s humanity, which is more typical in conflict situations. Instead, an I/Thou relationship implies a mutual respect for each other’s humanity and with this comes the attributes of respectful and effective communication. To explore this further, Buber believes it is a shift from the I/It communication to an I/Thou relation and that dialogue is a primary form of relationship. While much of Buber’s work centers on the interpersonal dynamics of communication between people, he also comments on the broader context and implications of these interpersonal relationships. “True community does not come into being because people have feelings for each other (though that is required, too), but rather on two accounts: all of them have to stand in a living, reciprocal relationship to a single living center, and they have to stand in a living, reciprocal relationship to one another” (Buber, 1996, p. 94).

This is profound in the sense that it reinforces the interdependent relationships we have with each other as social beings. This interdependence can evolve in many ways: where our goals are mutually satisfied; none are met; or a mixed bag with some being met and others not (Deutsch, 1982). Each step along the way influences what will next transpire as we build our relationships through this interdependence. We, therefore, need to foster a certain quality relationship amongst us and toward a common, overarching goal that is central to our existence. In the case of shifting from a relationship riddled with destructive conflict, the overarching goal is to create a peaceful existence through better quality interpersonal relationships that is done through better quality communication.

A second form of dialogue, such as that purported by Ellinor and Gerard (1998), refers to *having a dialogue* in terms of it being a transformational conversation in which a shift in thinking and action takes place. Here it is viewed as an “event.” People come together with a specific start and end time to hold this dialogue and this can be a sequence of dialogues to achieve particular goals. These events can be considered *rites of passage* in which the old form of communication and relationship comes to an end and a new way of communication and relationship begins. There is an implication here that the quality of the communication has the characteristics of what is implied in Buber’s I/Thou relationship, yet the focus is on the event of the interaction as being a dialogue rather than on the relationship. Something occurs in the communication that transforms it from what it was to a different dynamic. There are turning points in the flow of the conversation and the way the parties interact with one another that make a notable difference from the way they previously interacted with each other. It is this “event” that can alter the dynamics of the relationship from one of conflict and misunderstanding to one of peace and mutual respect.

Isaacs (1999) refers to a third type of dialogue as *techniques used to create the field or space* for the co-inquiry to occur. Here we focus on the conditions that create the atmosphere that allows the event of dialogue to take place with the I/Thou relationship qualities. In this view of dialogue participants, facilitators and organizers identify the qualities needed to change the dynamics to those of openness, trust and safety with no fear for retribution, so that those involved can feel more inclined to want to change their communication style and tone. This is a significant shift for those in conflict in which the qualities of trust and safety that lead to openness in communication have been eroded. It requires a deliberate, conscious and skilled effort to rebuild these relationships through improved lines of communication.

In considering the context as a critical factor in dialogue through the involvement of the community and surrounding environment, we are distributing the responsibility across a broader field. If we focus only on the actual communication itself there is potentially a great deal of pressure on the involved parties to make a change. These parties grew up in and were developed in their communities and it was these very social systems around them that influenced and shaped their points of view, how they communicated with others and the nature of the relationships they had with those within and outside their communities. In addition, there is fluidity between people and their environments so that one influences the other. In order to have more respectful and peaceful communication and better quality relationships, the environment has to be conducive to fostering these qualities and receptive to this change.

These three different ways of considering dialogue, as a *relationship*, an *event*, or a *context* overlap with each other in practice. The importance of noting the differences is that it influences how we think about and prepare for dialogues to take place. Do we want to improve the quality of our communication for our ongoing relationship as the focus with no specific beginning or end in sight? Do we want to target a specific time frame in which to hold a dialogue as a rite of passage event to create a new form of relationship? Or do we want to focus on the context and social conditions that allow for this new form of communication and relationship building to occur?

To put this into the realm of practice I will provide some real-life examples of cases in which dialogue as a form of communication has been used and the impact this had on the relationships of the involved parties and their communities. They will serve to demonstrate how dialogue can act as an agent to transform the quality of the communication. These examples of different dialogue practices are not meant to represent a comprehensive overview of the field, nor do they claim to be the only or best methods to use. Instead, they can be thought of as good examples of effective practice in the hope that by reading about them we will have a better understanding of how they work and why they are effective so we can apply these approaches to our own work in this area going forward.

Sustained Dialogue

The International Institute for Sustained Dialogue (IISD) was formed in collaboration with the Kettering Foundation. They define sustained dialogue as “a systematic, open-ended political process to transform relationships over time” (www.sustaineddialogue.org 2012). Sustained Dialogue (SD) approach focuses on transforming relationships and they do this through a five-stage process over a period of several meetings. They have a specifically defined concept of relationship that includes notions about identity, interests, power, perceptions, and patterns of interaction that plays a critical role both in organizing and facilitating how a dialogue process will begin and unfold. The five stages are: (1) deciding to engage to change their relationships; (2) mapping and naming their problems and relationships; (3) probing problems and relationships to identify the underlying dynamics; (4) scenario building to begin the process of envisioning different relationships; and (5) acting together to carry out these newly envisioned scenarios, integrate these notions about relationship in their design and process. SD is referred to as a political process and the IISD is clear to delineate that while governments may broker peace agreements, the citizenry holds the power to transform the political climate through their human relationships and this is the arena within which they work. Between relationship, event and context, the focus is on *relationship*.

Case Study

In the early 1990s Tajikistan gained independence from the Soviet Union. There was a weak infrastructure in place and civil war broke out causing thousands of deaths resulting in the installation of an authoritarian regime led by former Communist Party members. In early 1993, two Russian members of the Regional Conflicts Task Force (RCTF which later evolved into Sustained Dialogue) approached about 100 members of the warring factions to see if they would like to participate in a dialogue created by the task force. Over the course of the following

10 years they held more than 35 dialogue sessions, created two of their own NGOs for dialogue and democratic collaboration (Inter-Tajik Dialogue (ITD) and Public Committee for Democratic Processes (PCDP), which grew out of the ITD) and participated in United Nation's run mediated sessions between 1994 and 1997.

In 2000, the PCDP established a multi-track initiative in Tajikistan to rebuild the broken relationships amongst the people who had previously been embroiled in civil war and to facilitate the post UN-mediated peace. The PCDP did this by establishing regional dialogues so that the people living within each community could live in harmony and stability by rebuilding relationships with one another. For the first 2 years of these dialogue sessions they focused on creating a shared understanding of the relationship between religion, state and society in Tajikistan. This was important because the voice of the people was heard, healing was allowed to take place and they had an opportunity to take an active role in shaping how the government in their local communities would be run. In addition, these dialogue sessions led to establishing an undergraduate curriculum in conflict resolution and peace building in collaboration with the Ministry of Education. This educational initiative would instill in their young adults the mindset and skills to resolve issues constructively and avoid another outbreak of destructive civil war. They also developed the procedure of holding public dialogues on issues of national importance to involve the citizenry at large.

The initiative of implementing and developing the use of dialogue as a means of communication to build peace through active involvement of the citizenry worked well in this scenario. There were leaders in place who had the energy and skills to recognize the importance of this initiative and a population looking for a way to heal and rebuild community. They knew they would continue to live and work together in interdependence and they were determined to create relationships that would allow peaceful coexistence. The focus of SD in this case was on building *relationship*.

World Café

The World Café developed by chance when a group of business and academic leaders who were gathered for a large circle dialogue in a town in northern California, were rained out and instead engaged in smaller group dialogues. They randomly and periodically rotated members of each small group to share and build on insights with the other groups. At the end of that morning they realized that they had developed a new method for gathering collective intelligence that allowed for more creative and critical strategic thinking. They wanted to capture what it was that enabled this to take place and through action research in several countries they developed the seven design principles of the World Café and the foundational concepts of what they refer to as “conversational leadership.” The World Café design and process is most closely related to being a dialogue *event*, rather than focusing on relationships or context.

The seven principles of the World Café are to: (1) *set the context* so the purpose for bringing the participants together at this time is clear; (2) *create hospitable space* so the participants feel comfortable and safe to openly share their ideas; (3) *explore questions that matter* to the participants so they feel the relevance of this dialogue to their own lives; (4) *encourage everyone's contribution* and in doing so acknowledge that people may choose to participate in different ways at different points in the process; (5) *connect diverse perspectives* that is done by people rotating to different tables and connecting the distinct conversations; (6) *listen together for insights, patterns and themes* that emerge as the success of the World Café is determined by the quality of the listening participants do; and (7) *share collective discoveries* that is done at the end in the “harvest” portion of the process when the individual table conversations are connected to the whole by identifying common themes and patterns (www.theworldcafe.com/principles.html 2012).

Case Study

There are many examples of the ways in which World Café has made a difference in communities, organizations and the everyday lives of the participants. Listed here are a few examples to demonstrate the breadth of applications for this dialogic event.

- Climate change is a growing concern for many and they believe people who can do something about it are not paying enough attention to the topic. A World Café was held in Boston, Massachusetts with its main purpose to strategically develop ways to foreground the conversation on climate change to engage politicians and the public at large into the conversation.
- In the UK a World Café entitled “Transforming Conflict” focused on creating innovative ways in which to introduce and develop life skills for children through education.
- In Thailand, over 3,000 citizens gathered in conversation about Thailand’s future. Their recommendations were sent to the future political leaders, which was especially poignant considering the escalating conflict between different political factions in Bangkok.
- In Mexico the National Fund for Social Enterprise gathered a diverse group of stakeholders to discuss the focus of the social economy in Mexico and the world. Decisions were made for next year’s agenda and a follow-up World Café is scheduled for the following year to build on the current year’s initiatives.

By joining diverse voices together to collectively address issues that pertain to them all through a World Café event, more voices are heard and acknowledged and the chances for these recommendations being implemented and followed are increased. When stakeholders are invited to give voice to their concerns they have a vested interest in making their recommendations successful. This can be directly linked to more cohesive and peaceful communities.

Public Conversations Project

The Public Conversations Project (PCP) is an organization whose mission is to support individuals, organizations and communities to be able to have difficult conversations in a respectful and civilized manner. They do this through the use of dialogue, which they define as “a structured conversation or series of conversations, intended to create, deepen and build human relationships and understanding” (www.publicconversations.org/dialogue 2012). In their work with individuals and communities they train and facilitate members to use qualities of dialogic communication in their conversations. This includes the characteristics of dialogue mentioned earlier, such as listening so that all are mutually heard, speaking respectfully so that all are understood the way they want to be understood and broadening perspectives to include those of others in addition to one’s own views. PCP focuses mostly on *context* aspects of dialogue knowing that the quality of the communication in relationship needs to be paid attention to as well.

Case Study

PCP works globally. One example of the work they have done to repair war torn communities and transform the communication and relationships was in Burundi, where PCP worked with Hutu, Tutsi and Twa villagers after their very violent civil war. PCP worked with a local organization, Community Leadership Center (CLC), to train a cadre of master trainers to design and facilitate dialogues across Burundi. The master trainers with the guidance of PCP learned these skills, carried out pilot dialogues with PCP support and then took the PCP dialogue principles and practices and localized it to their own culture. In their brochure describing the dialogue process they followed there were a couple of points worth noting, especially in the way PCP and CLC prepared the context for the dialogues to occur (www.publicconversations.org/dialogue/international/burundi 2011).

Relationships and trust were so destroyed during the years of violence that it was a big challenge to be able to bring people together in the same space to engage in respectful communication. The first step of the process was for the participants and facilitators to create communication agreements, which in effect were the ground rules for the dialogue. This is an important first step in making explicit what will and will not be accepted as a practice in their dialogues as a beginning for establishing a safe environment that will support the participants in rebuilding their trust. The next step was that the facilitators began the dialogue by asking opening questions. Here the facilitators play a key role by getting the conversation started and setting the tone by modeling the types of questions and the manner in which they can be asked. Once the conversation began participants were encouraged to ask their own questions that focused on curiosity and interest. This focuses them on the potential sharing and learning that can take place and not having the conversation turn into a blaming exercise. In closing, the facilitators then asked questions to bring the

session to an end with the agreement of next steps, which could include further dialogue sessions. The way this process unfolded and the role of the facilitator in action weighed this more heavily on creating the conditions for dialogue to take place, locating it more centrally in the *context* focus of dialogue.

The communities in Burundi knew that in order to continue living and building a good quality of life, they needed to shift the dynamics that existed amongst them. Their once thriving communities had deteriorated into bloodshed and they needed to do something to regain the safety in their environment, to rebuild their community. They selected to learn and practice dialogue as a means to this goal and to localize it so that it was culturally relevant to them.

Other Uses of Dialogue

The three examples above present some level of detail of how Sustainable Dialogue, World Café and Public Conversations Project used dialogue as relationship, event and context. Dialogue can have additional, broader usage depending on the purpose and how it is framed. These thoughts and applications are being shared here because they may deepen understanding of the concept and practice of dialogue, appeal to some readers for their own specific purposes and knowing about them may trigger other ideas as well.

Stewart et al. (2004) in their review of dialogue identified five core philosophies of dialogue. In these five approaches to dialogue one particular characteristic stood out as being common to all five and that was the concept of holism: “for Bohm the ‘implicate order’, for Buber the wholeness of human being, for Bakhtin the whole of speech communicating, for Freire the whole of critical consciousness, and for Gadamer the whole of the relation between the human and his or her world” (p. 26). We can think of this sense of holism as the whole person being engaged, the whole relationship as the focus, the whole interaction and the whole community.

Yankelovich (1999) indicates that dialogue can be used on a larger scale to bring about social change. Cissna and Anderson (1994) believe that the ideals of dialogue are difficult to sustain as the standard of communication, but that within any communication there can be *dialogic moments*. Dialogue requires a higher level of awareness of our assumptions, our style of communication and how we express ourselves, deeper listening skills and that this increased intensity and focus is challenging to maintain over any extended period of time. Pearce and Pearce (2000) build on Cissna and Anderson’s notion of dialogic moments to find a longer stretch of time than a dialogic moment although shorter than a constant norm of communication. They name this “episode,” which is a series of turns in communication within a given interaction with an agreed to beginning and end (Pearce & Pearce, 2000). In framing communication in episodes, they view that the qualities of dialogic communication can be sustained within an episode and the duration of an episode can vary depending upon the agreed to number of turns in the conversation.

Bohm (1997) talks about dialogue as being about collectively changing thought processes and creating the space for that to occur. The collective change

of thought processes can be linked to Yankelovich's support of dialogue as a means toward social change. Bohm's suggestion about creating the space for dialogue to occur connects the use of dialogue as providing the context for within which it can occur, similar to how the Public Conversations Project case used dialogue.

Problems in Communication During Conflict

If we look at the factors affecting communication and assume the worst-case scenarios when these dynamics are in play, we have communication while in conflict. It starts with us not having a developed sense of self-awareness so that we do not fully understand why the actions of others impact us the way they do. This is in large part because we may not be clear about our underlying needs and interests and may be looking for satisfying our surface demands instead. In addition, this undeveloped self-awareness may also lead us to not fully understand the impact our actions have on others. It then continues on to us not holding a shared understanding of what it means to be in relationship with others the way they envision it. If the environment within which these interactions take place is hostile it can exacerbate the impact of our communication so that both sides' negative attributes are magnified. Add to this eroded trust from these destructive dynamics and we have a strong case for assuming bad intentions as a filter for interpreting and understanding other people's behavior. We will explore the impact of *emotions*, *patterns*, *framing* and *blaming* that occur and hamper our communication when we are in conflict.

Emotions

Conflict brings up many emotions, usually negative, and this emotional overlay clouds our thinking, adding to the lack of clarity in our communication and exacerbating the affect of assuming bad intentions. The context may play a role in fueling the conflict if the parties are embedded in a hostile environment that puts them more on the defensive and less willing to engage in open and constructive communication. This makes it easier for the hostilities and conflict to escalate and increasingly more difficult to de-escalate and resolve.

Patterns

Our communication style generally becomes habitual characterized by specific patterns we use of which we may or may not be aware. Patterns we default to that do not improve our communication and in fact may lead to destructive outcomes may be referred to as *Unwanted Repetitive Patterns* (URPs). Typically, we have reactions that are out of habit and we are not aware of these patterns resorting to

them by default. We may end up in a repetitive rut and wonder why we are not achieving the results we want, not the first, fifth or fifteenth time we repeat the same pattern of interaction. If we were aware of these repetitive patterns the next step would be to want to change them and do something different that is not part of our habit. We may not have alternative methods to use and so we may fall back to our default pattern of reacting, knowing full well that even as we are speaking the communication will not lead to the results we want because it never did in the past. This can lead to frustration and feelings of being stuck in a vicious cycle.

Framing

Our worldview created by our experiences, values, culture and other influencing factors shapes how we see the world. This way of framing our experiences affects what we pay attention to, how we interpret it, how we understand and make meaning out of it and then how we connect it to what we know and what we believe is important. If we assume bad intentions as in a relationship in conflict, then we will more likely than not frame other peoples' comments and actions in a negative light. In addition, we may be prone to interpret their communication and action as having ulterior motives, especially because we probably have a very low level of trust, if any.

Blaming

In conflict situations, we tend to attribute all actions from others as intentional, especially if they harm us. If they insist it was not intentional, we will still probably attribute blame to them and fault them for not being more careful, for not taking our wants into consideration, and perhaps for wanting to take revenge against us. In turn, even if we do the same actions to others we will not attribute the same level of blame to our own behavior, even though the other party most likely will attribute it to us.

These attitudes and behaviors lead to styles of communication that destroy our relationships and they are typical of what happens in conflict. In this next section are recommendations on how to improve relationships by shifting our attitudes and behaviors to practice more dialogic communication.

Preventing and Overcoming Problems in Communication

At the beginning of the chapter we mentioned that we would be looking *at* communication rather than *through* it, so that we could focus on the method and process of the communication itself. We reviewed dialogue as an approach to communication that leads to more effective outcomes and improved relationships.

In exploring dialogue we saw that there are three broad categories of how dialogue is framed and approached including focusing on the relationship, event or context, yet in practice the reality is that it tends to be a blended method. We also noted the broader applications of dialogic communication and some of the affects it may inspire. We explored factors affecting communication and how these factors may erode our communication when in conflict situations.

In order to communicate more effectively and subsequently improve our relationships, it is necessary for us to pay more attention to the quality and process of our communication. We need to be more deliberate about what we say and how we say it instead of relying on our default mode, which may lead us into URPs. At the risk of becoming hypersensitive we need to be more thoughtful in how we phrase what we say, in our word choices, in our timing, in the tone we use, in anticipating the impact on the other party in conversation with us, the surrounding environment and context and what we hope to achieve as a follow up to that exchange.

As stated earlier, the characteristics of dialogic communication common across many approaches to dialogue are that it involves: listening deeply to each other; co-creating shared understanding through joint inquiry; becoming aware of and suspending assumptions; deepening the connection and strengthening the relationship; taking place in a space or container that allows this to happen so that we get in touch with the essence of our humanity. The following framing addresses these factors in three stages labeled *Preparation*, *In the Moment*, *Reflection*, incorporating the themes of “*self, other, relationship, emotions, context and episode*” and “*problems in communication during conflict (emotions, patterns, framing and blaming)*” and includes specific practices so that these qualities can be practiced and integrated into our everyday communication. If we practice this type of dialogic communication, there are increased chances we will prevent some conflicts from occurring, lessen the possibility that conflicts that do occur will escalate and that we will be able to resolve our conflicts sooner with solutions that are mutually beneficial.

Stages Framework

Stage One: Preparation. There is some preparatory work that we can do to help ourselves become more self-aware and knowledgeable about those with whom we interact. We have experienced so much in life that there are many layers of influencing factors that have shaped who we have become and are becoming. This is lifework in that there are endless opportunities for us to know ourselves and other people more deeply through every experience we have. More specific details will be provided under the sub-headings of *Self*, *Other* and *Framing*.

Self. Developing stronger self-awareness is a core underlying foundational necessity to improving the quality of communication so that conflict is either prevented or managed constructively. Knowing our worldview, values and what is important to us helps us identify our core needs and interests and how far we

are willing to go to stand up for what we believe in and not feel compromised. At the same time, it helps us prioritize our interests so that we have more clarity when we enter into negotiations with others. There are two suggestions for tools that facilitate this exploration into deeper self-awareness. One is the *Daisy Model* from *Coordinated Management of Meaning* (CMM), which provides a format for us to map our social worlds and the influencing factors that have shaped our worldviews (Pearce et al., 2011). In the center of the Daisy Model we put our name and then on each petal surrounding the center we write in key people, events and circumstances that have had a profound influence on us during our lives. The petals on the surface have a stronger influence at this time and the petals underneath have a secondary influence. The influencing factors on these petals may change places to be more or less influential depending on the context and relationships with those with whom we are interacting.

A second model is the *Social Identity Map* that is a Venn diagram including *Life Context*, *Life Choices* and *Personality Attributes* (Fisher-Yoshida & Geller, 2009). In the Life Context circle we include items, such as our cultural background, family status and birth order, socioeconomic status, age and physical attributes. In the Life Choices circle we include educational attainment, career choices, religious practices and leisure pursuits. In the third circle, Personality Attributes are items such as aptitudes, strengths, limitations and motivations. This information may seem obvious, but we have found that the process of thinking about it, writing it down and mapping it out brings new insights to people about their core values and reasons why they place importance on certain aspects of their lives. This influences our behavior and the choices we make and the more we understand this the better able we are to make choices that satisfy our core interests.

Other. The second part of preparation for dialogue and transforming communication in addition to knowing ourselves is to know others with who we are in relationship. We can use the Daisy Model and Social Identity Mapping as tools to identify influences on the other party and their values, beliefs and assumptions. We can do this before meeting with them and then spend time with them verifying that what we assumed to be true is accurate or not. This can be done directly by sharing the Daisy Models and Social Identity Mappings or creating them together if the relationship and context are conducive to this level of disclosure. If not, then we can use active listening skills so that we are attuned to listening for information that can help clarify and verify whether the assumptions we made about the other party are accurate or need to be modified. Either way, knowing more about the other party's values and beliefs will support us in understanding the other person better and in identifying resolutions that will appeal to their needs and interests. Using inquiry to gather information and reflecting back what we heard, can assure the other party that we hear them and acknowledge their interests. In order to do this well, we may first need to create the context that allows safety and trust to be built in order to expand the level of disclosure possible.

Framing. The influences that develop who we are and how we see the world create frames, from which we view, interpret, understand and make meaning of

our worlds. The more we develop our self-awareness and awareness of others the more apparent these frames are to us and the more aware we can be about the perspectives we are taking and how these may be biasing our understanding of a situation. This in turn will also influence the decisions we make and the actions we take, and likewise for our conversation partner. Transforming communication so that we transform conflict into constructive relationships requires us to broaden our perspectives so that we can see, interpret, understand and make meaning from more than one perspective (Fisher-Yoshida, 2009). Using different frames offers us a broader spectrum of possibilities, which can allow us to be more creative in seeking mutually beneficial outcomes to a conflict situation.

Stage Two: In the Moment. Engaging in dialogue with others requires good listening skills to create shared understanding that is mutually beneficial. We are able to do this more effectively once we have a stronger sense of self-awareness and awareness of others because we will have been able to identify what our core needs and interests are through this exploration. The more developed this awareness is the better equipped we will be to engage more deeply in empathic listening and to clarify our own thoughts and feelings. It might be helpful to frame dialogic encounters as episodes (mentioned earlier referencing Pearce & Pearce, 2000) so we can clearly demark the beginning and end of a series of conversation turns within an interaction. This framing of a dialogue as an episode would lend itself to all three approaches to dialogue as building relationship, holding an event and creating the context. This section addresses the actual dialogic episode by looking at *Relationship*, *Context* and *Dialogic Communication*.

Relationship. Dialogic communication builds relationship because within these dialogic episodes we are engaging in quality communication that improves our mutual understanding. There is an increased chance for feeling heard and acknowledged and this empathy can go a long way in improving relationship dynamics. In addition, through relationship building we are able to address dynamics that may stem from power differences to level the playing field within these episodes. These dialogic episodes transform the very nature of our disjointed and destructive communication in conflict to one of mutual benefit and caring in peace.

Context. We need to create suitable conditions that make it easier for us to be open and receptive to more deeply listen to others and express ourselves in ways we want to be heard (Isaacs, 1999). This space needs to make us feel safe and to have trust in the process and others, which is a leap of faith when we have been in conflict. Having a facilitator (as mentioned in the Public Conversations Project work in Burundi) very often provides the security for feeling safe and developing trust as the participants initially rely on the facilitator to be the protector and enforcer of the agreed upon ground rules. This responsibility will eventually be shared by all once their experiences in these dialogic episodes strengthens their relationships and trust.

Dialogic Communication. The characteristics of dialogue communication include empathic listening in that our focus is on listening to understand.

Gathering information through good listening skills helps us identify the core needs, interests and feelings of the other party with whom we are in communication. Listening as a first step is a way to show caring and can then relax the other party and open them up to being more receptive to hearing what we have to say. There is a craft and an art to expressing ourselves constructively. The craft is to phrase our thoughts and feelings in ways that are easier for the other party to hear and that accurately reflect what we want to say. The art of this involves developing sensitivity to timing, framing, pacing, and phrasing that is favorable to a constructive conversation and relationship building. We all make assumptions, which can be traced back to tactics we use for survival. In dialogue it is important to temporarily suspend the assumptions we make or look for confirmation to prove them accurate or not. This deepens the connection we make with the other party, which shifts the tone of our interaction and improves the quality of the relationship. Stringing a series of these dialogic episodes together can dramatically transform the nature of the relationship. New habits and patterns are being formed to replace the URPs that may have characterized the relationship and conflict in the past. There is mutual respect even in disagreement and a desire to honor and stay with the process because of the belief that it will lead to beneficial outcomes.

Stage Three: Reflection. There is much learning opportunity in the space we set aside for reflecting on our interactions and communication. Argyris and Schon (1974) identify *reflection-on-action* and *reflection-in-action* as two stages of reflective practice. When we reflect-on-action it is after a communication, for example, is completed and we look back over what took place, assess the process and outcomes, and the status of the relationships as a result of that interaction. If we do this on a regular basis we will build up experience at reflecting and being able to identify best practices that we can then apply to future communication. Reflecting-in-action is when we are able to take a meta view of the situation and detach emotionally from what is happening, so that we can look at it with an eye toward assessing the process and whether it is leading us toward desired outcomes. The advantage of reflecting-in-action is that we are better able to redirect our communication in the moment, while it is taking place, and assure more constructive outcomes. Dialogic communication is what reflective learning can foster. It is a method that needs practice in order for it to become more deeply ingrained in how we operate on a regular basis. This section addresses reflective processes from the perspective of *Critical Reflection* and *Unwanted Repetitive Patterns*.

Critical reflection. This can take place whether we are reflecting on action or in action, as long as we are identifying our assumptions, beliefs and perspectives. The act of critically reflecting stimulates us to become more conscious about what we think and feel and how that relates to the decisions we make and actions we take. This process is a disciplined way to surface hidden assumptions we have about ourselves, about other people, about our situation and the context and how this influences the perspective we take (Mezirow, 2000). One of our challenges is that when we are in the middle of an interaction and if it is a conflict situation, our emotions may cloud our judgment and we will not be able to reflect-in-action.

When reflecting-on-action after the interaction has concluded and our emotions are back to normal, we can have a less biased and emotional view of the situation and we may be able to gain insights into the interaction. Another model that might be useful in these situations to use individually or with others is the *Quadrants of Reflection Chart with Guiding Questions* (Fisher-Yoshida & Geller, 2009). The two axes represent individual and group on one axis and in-action and on-action on the other axis. There are a series of questions within each quadrant that can be used to stimulate dialogue and reflection on the process of interaction. This is especially useful as a tool to use in teams to reflect on group process.

Unwanted Repetitive Patterns (URPs). In addition to reflecting on our assumptions, beliefs and perspectives, we can reflect on the patterns of our communication and whether there were any URPs inhibiting us from having more productive communication. These URPs can be interrupted through this enhanced focus of consciousness by looking *at* our communication rather than *through* it. First we need to recognize that our communication has fallen into a pattern of responses that are not benefitting us and that may be deteriorating our relationships. We then want to identify ways in which we can interrupt these patterns to change the dynamics for better outcomes. The more we have developed our self-awareness the more we will know our core needs and interests. A model that may be useful to detecting URPs is the *Serpentine Model* in CMM (Pearce, 2007). This model helps to track the flow of the conversation and within this flow the parties take turns in the communication. Each one of these turns can be thought of as a *bifurcation point* or *critical moment* (Pearce, 2007). Bifurcation points are choice points we have within any communication episode. Someone says something to us as a first turn in a conversation and we have a choice as to how we respond in the second turn. How we respond will influence the next choice or third turn our conversation partner makes, and so on. Each response stimulates a response from the other person. Being more deliberate about the choices we make will help direct the communication flow toward a more constructive and desirable outcome creating new and healthier patterns of communication.

Creating New Social Worlds of Sustainable Peace

This chapter has focused on looking at ways to transform communication so that we shift from conflict communication to dialogic communication. This shift changes the quality of our communication, interactions and relationships resulting in better social worlds. Why is this important for sustainable peace?

If we think about the communication patterns we create and sustain out of habit, we can use this to our advantage by creating and sustaining healthier patterns of communication, which in turn build healthier relationships. Earlier in the chapter we identified dialogic episodes as being more sustainable than ongoing dialogic communication and more expansive and extensive than dialogic moments. Making these dialogic episodes more of a reality even if only an intention as a beginning

will support the creation of a different type of interaction than what may have been experienced in the past. It is certainly different from what happens between people in conflict.

Conflict is habitual and it engages us in URPs that continuously lead us to destructive relationships and a deterioration of our social worlds. When we've experienced it over a period of time it becomes tiresome and an energy drain. Turning these patterns upside down so that we create constructive habits and patterns is possible. They will be easier to sustain in small bites. The more we practice and support these dialogic episodes the more they become a part of who we are, a part of our communities and the new social worlds we are creating.

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