Leading Sustainable Relationships
A Framework of Three Fundamental Conditions for Transforming Conflicts to Opportunities

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INTRODUCTION

The Importance of Quality Relationships in a Complex World

We live in an increasingly unsettling and volatile environment. Beset by constant change, intrusive new technologies, challenging conflicts and growing interdependency, modern societies desperately rely on strong and enduring human relationships. Resilient connection may be the key ingredient to sustain the delicate fabric of society and help people benefit from the opportunities hidden in diversity and differences. Relationships are also the foundation for learning and growth. People learn from those they care about. Yet, the relational process involves a wide range of emotions that immensely affect how and what is learned. Emotions drive attention and attention drives learning. As Weissberg (2013) maintained: "Technical and academic skills get people a job but what keeps a job are social and emotional competencies. These competencies get people advance…and those skills can be taught." Today's complexity requires life-long learners, who are responsive and can socially function as best as they can.

Communication is at the heart of our personal and professional relationships whether interaction is between family members, social and professional colleagues, political leaders and management and employees. It is no longer a linear, one-way transmission of knowledge, as has been traditionally believed, but an unfolding interactive process in which meaning is conjointly generated in a participative fashion. Attention shifts from *what* knowledge is to *how* knowledge is generated through interactions. Inventive forms of communication that embrace conflicts and diversity, and foster inclusion of multiple voices and differences are essential for supporting durable relationships. Communication, therefore, is the glue for supporting meaningful strong relationships. Relationships have expanded and amplified with the promise of the information age, the speedy new technologies and the explosion of social media, yet relatedness in a deeper and authentic sense lingers behind. Regardless of endless connections and relationships modernity also amplified alienation, and people may experience insufficient sense of kinship.

Quality connections become particularly pertinent in the workplace, where billions of people spend most of their day. This is where they are eager to get involved, voice their opinions, impact reality and participate in decision-making. It is the value of relationships, which profoundly determines whether these aspirations get accomplished. While products are fairly replaceable, healthy relations are more challenging to sustain. The prevalent hierarchical and monologist organizational approaches become inadequate for coping with the emerging needs for transforming differences to opportunities and encouraging stakeholders' engagement in decision-making. Significant issues in this regard are how to support constant learning and growth through effective engagement with conflicts, how to create constructive multiplicity, and the role of leadership in fostering nurturing environments that promote these challenges. Vital organizations that foster these qualities rely on *sustainable relationships* and constructive communicative practices. By sustainable relationships I refer to long-term, meaningful and mutually beneficial relationships for all stakeholders that support the transformation of disparities to opportunities and accomplish it cooperatively. Such relationships serve as a powerful asset in present times of constant change, diversity, and high competition.

Emotional and Social-Psychological Aspects are Critical Yet Often Being Neglected. Building healthy and meaningful relationships, particularly in environments fraught with multiplicity and of conflict, requires special attention to emotional and social psychological drivers of relationships. Variance generates strong emotions that if not handled constructively, could turn relationships poisonous, stimulate negative emotions, and fuel rejection and defensive interactions. However, people's tendency is to focus on tangible outcomes such as facts, agreements, numbers, and rational calculations (Curhan, Elfenbein, & Xu, 2006). Leaders, politicians, and CEOs--those most responsible for determining the approach taken to conflict management-- are often blind to the emotional and psychological powers affecting actions (Shapiro, 2010). Perceiving differences and conflicts as economically driven processes led by rational parties is a prevalent notion. This approach results in overlooking crucial emotional and social psychological elements, which might galvanize conflicts. Research demonstrates that negotiators and mediators are highly interested in addressing a wide array of social-psychological goals, including parties' feelings about themselves, relational matters, and

process related goals. In a series of studies (Curhan et al., 2006; Elfenbein, Curhan & Anger, 2010), whereby negotiators were asked to prioritize their goals, objective tangible outcomes, such as agreements were not ranked higher than social psychological outcomes such as relationship quality, face saving, fairness, listening, and positive emotions. Furthermore, one in five participants did not mention any tangible outcomes at all. In a sequel 2-round negotiation study, negotiators' social psychological outcomes in the first negotiation round were a better predictor than objective outcomes of both the desire to negotiate again with the same counterpart, as well as of the objective outcome in the second negotiation. However, though social-psychological outcomes are highly significant for negotiators, these goals are often neglected in the process of managing conflicts (Peleg-Baker, 2012; b; c; 2014; 2014a; Peleg-Baker, et. al., 2012).

Focusing on the Relational Process. In light of the salient role of relationships in shaping people's well-being, development and optimal goal attainment, it is pertinent to focus on the relational *process* in addition to the *outcome.* In other words, it is crucial to increase awareness to the ways people relate to others and how others treat them as well as the quality of the contexts in which relationships are formed.

Driven by diversity and constant change, conflict is natural and an inseparable part of living. Still, conflict is not a simple matter. It creates sensitive and poignant relational and emotional issues to grapple with. Working with diverse conflictual groups in Israel, I noticed the automatic nature of people's reaction in these contexts. Under intense emotions and frustration, people cling on to their preexisting notions and react defensively even in the face of contradicting information. Perceiving opposing evidence as a threat to their identity, they try to adamantly defend it (Cohen et. al., 2000), and preserve consistency (Festinger, 1957). Though conflicts could also bring a great opportunity for learning and growth, these dispositions and other psychological biases (see Ross & Ward, 1995; Tversky & Kahneman, 1974; Ross et al., 2010) act as barriers for taking advantage of differences and cultivating sustainable relationships. As much as people try to ignore or reject negative emotions and complex psychological dynamics, they will not fade away. They powerfully impact relations with others, when making decisions and negotiating.

The Role of Leadership. Fostering quality connections and their coordination in meaningful and integrative ways rapidly replaces past focus on individual aptitudes and the omnipotent top-down leader who controls it all. For decades, top-down governance has dictated human interactions. However, although leadership is still greatly important for addressing today's needs, its role is gradually changing. A major responsibility of leadership is to inspire and implement a collaborative culture in which diverse ideas are welcome and integrated. This challenge implies incorporating supportive organizational systems and practices that ensure addressing people's human needs and wish to participate. Kelly (1999) suggested that the power of those in the bottom is waiting to be discovered and minimal centralization may bring it to new heights.

Addressing the wide range of emotional and social psychological considerations involved in constructing sustainable relationships is daunting. How can people consider numerous emotions and social-psychological barriers to flowing communication, particularly if often barriers are outside of conscious? How do people suppose to know what others mean or feel? In short, how could people navigate their way to form constructive relationships built on their differences? Recognizing the plethora of emotional and social-psychological factors driving relational processes, I propose a framework to capture them through three fundamental conditions: 1) The mode of relation, 2) The approach to conflict, and, 3) The condition of human needs. Rooted in diverse fields, the three conditions provide a useful compass for navigating toward constructive sustainable relationships. Though somewhat distinct, they are highly interrelated. Only together they fully capture the human dimension to be considered when preparing for, managing and reflecting on negotiations, difficult conversations and any relations. The approach taken toward each condition can either serve as a barrier against or support for sustainable relations. In addition to clarifying and examining existing relationships, the framework can also be used as a guideline for leaders and practitioners to bring organizational realities of a higher level of connectedness into being. As people are more aware of the conditions, the more likely they are to effectively deal with them, and the more relationship and tangled emotions become positive.

1. **Dialogic Communication-** a Constructive Mode of Relating

The first fundamental condition for building sustainable relationships highlights the mode of relating to the other. Whether others are recognized as subjective wholes is a basic determinant of the quality of relations. Other types of relations generate manipulative, short-lived relations. This condition invites us to become more mindful the relational reality we construct and its e patterns. Accepting the other as a whole human being, of various sides and contradictions on an equal basis is likely to promote growth and *Dialogic Communication*. Conversely, the consequences of relating to others as inferiors, excluding and labeling them as strangers, are rejection, poisonous relations and failure to produce growth. In such relations, the other is not validated and is referred to as an *object*--an instrument for achieving one's goals, rather than a *subject*. Facilitating organizational transformation and working with identity groups, our first task was to help participants in examining their mode of relating and understanding the connection between their own whole self and others in order to pave the way to valuable relations and constructive dialogic communication. The nature of such mode of communication is elaborated next through the concept of *dialogue* and additional relational ideas such as *respect* and *core relatedness* and my own practice promoting dialogic relations.

The concept of dialogue has been extensively studied and used by many scholars and practitioners in different disciplines. The concept derives from the old Greek word *dialogos* in which *dia* is *through*, and *logos* means *word* or *meaning* (Bohm, 1996; Bohm et al., 1991). Literally, the ancient understanding of the term *logos* was *to gather together*. Dialogue, therefore, is a *flow of meaning* created cojointly. Although dialogue is often suggested as an ideal form of communication, its most common understanding and analysis is a form of conversation or discursive coordination of particular episodes. Many scholars focus on ways of *doing* dialogue and on certain dialogic episodes within a sequence of conversational turns (e.g. Gergen et. al., 2004; Grant et al., 2004; Hawes, 1999; Pearce & Pearce, 2000; Putnam & Fairhurst, 2001). Moreover, some dialogue theorists point at the limited temporal dimension of dialogue. Yet, views such as Buber's (1923, 1958), Bohm's (1996), Bakhtin's (1981) and Freire's (1970), open a possibility for understanding human relation as a state of being, and examine *subject-object* relations and you/ me relational dichotomy.

Prominent scholars such as Buber (1923, 1958), Bohm (1996), Bakhtin (1981; 1984), Levinas (1969; 1985), Parker-Follett (1942), Taylor (1989), Gergen et al. (1999; 2001), and Pearce, (Pearce & Pearce, 2000) see dialogue as a relational practice. This approach represents a shift from an individualistic mindset in which the person is observed as separate, autonomous and inward-oriented, to viewing the self and relations as interdependent, emerging, and constantly evolving. Another way of perceiving dialogue is the descriptive versus prescriptive dichotomy (Pearce & Pearce, 2000; Stewart, Zediker, & Black, 2004). Both approaches take a relational orientation to creating meaning. While the prescriptive approach views dialogic communication as a particular desirable type of communication, the descriptive orientation indicates dialogic elements in all forms of communication. Some scholars underlined distinctions between dialogue and other forms of communication such as debate, deliberation and discussion. Bohm suggests that discussion:

> *"Means to break things up… Discussion is almost like a ping- pong game, where people are battling the idea back and forth and the object of the game is to win or to get points for yourself…the basic point is to win the game…In a dialogue, however, nobody is trying to win. Everybody wins if everybody wins…a dialogue is something more of a common participation in which we are not playing a game against each other but with each other. In a dialogue everybody wins*." (Bohm, 1996, pp. 7).

Exploring the roots of the crises humanity faces, Bohm suggested dialogue to facilitate the understanding of social processes that fragment and interfere with real communication between individuals, nations and within organizations (Bohm, Factor & Garrett 1991). Recognizing people ability to effectively interact in a variety of ways such as playing and dancing, he was troubled by their restricted ability to examine issues that deeply matter to them, often leading to dispute, division and even violence. He thought that this condition reflects a deep and prevalent flaw in the process of human thought. Bohm described dialogue as "a stream of meaning

flowing among and through us and between us …   out of which may emerge some new understanding…something creative… this shared meaning is the glue or cement that holds people and societies together" (1996, p.7). He was interested in re-examining the underlying processes and fundamental assumptions concerning content and especially parties' tendency to view themselves as separate entities that leads to partition and interfere with their ability to generate real communication (Bohm et al., 1991; Bohm, 1996).

Martin Buber, a significant scholar in the study of dialogue, proposed a *principle of human life* with his *dialogic principle* manifested in *I-Thou* relation. He introduced human's *twofold* perspective to relation: I-It versus I-Thou*.* When it was first published in 1923, Buber's thought was pioneering in a world that was predominantly characterized by *onefold* I-It relationship. I-It represents subject-object relating: a manipulative and instrumental relationship, echoing western individualistic thinking in which the other is an object used to serve one's interest. I-Thou relationship, on the other hand, signifies *genuine meeting* (Buber, 1923) between two subjects. One acknowledges the other as a complete person, who becomes an *I*, another whole subject. This type of interaction is based on mutual recognition and focuses on the relational space. While I-It stresses what goes on in each person's mind, I-Thou emphasizes what takes place between people, creating a different kind of human connection. The self is not separated but transforms through its evolving connection with the other. Such mode of relation represents a powerful alternative to what Fromm (1941) described as a dominant feeling of isolation and alienation in the modern society. For Buber, I-Thou and I-It were inseparable. Neither part is complete without the other, and together they reflect a quality of relationships. However, the I-Thou relation requires special effort. A genuine meeting occurs when awareness takes place of I, Thou*,* and the relation. In Buber's words: In dialogue, "whether spoken or silent . . . each of the participants really has in mind the other or others in their present and particular being and turns to them with the intention of establishing a living mutual relation between himself and them" (1965, p. 19). In a later work, Buber indicated three essential aspects of dialogue: 1. Recognizing that others are unique and whole persons, and being able to see the reality of the other; 2. A genuine nature of relation in which dialogic partners do not pretend, and do not reserve what is important to share; and 3. Respect for the other wherein the other is being supported to fully unfold (Cissna, & Anderson, 1998).

In the same vein, the Brazilian educator and dialogic theorist Paulo Freire maintained that personal freedom and individual development couldn't be accomplished at the expense of others, for that would be an act of oppression. It is achieved only through cooperating with others. Although to him dialogue was temporal-- "a moment where humans meet to reflect on their reality as they make and remake it," (Shor & Freire, 1987, p. 98), he nevertheless views such moment as reality defining, a drastic event for participants (Freire, 1970). Drawing on Winnicott's "true self" (1965) in which the self is spontaneously being revealed and developed through relationships and on Buber's I-Thou, Wilberg (1998) labels genuine relation as *core relatedness*- authentically relating from the innermost core of self-being by attending to *someone*, not to *something.* In contrast to the western culture dominated by I-It relationships wherein the self is something people *have,* core relatedness means not *having* but *being* and genuinely so. Wilberg suggests that conversions or discussions do not necessarily engender authentic relatedness. *Relating* to one another is not the same as *Relationships*- People are involved in different types of relationships, which often protect them but though relating is at the heart of relationships, relationships could many times be the death of genuine relating. Relating in a most authentic sense is "communication that takes place without words and symbols" (Wilberg, 1998).

Similar to Buber's I-Thou and Wilberg's core relating concepts is the idea of *dignity-based* respect. Respect is a social concept portraying the way people relate to others. Scholars from different fields apply the concept of respect to elucidate human interactions. Respect to the flag, nature, or animals are borrowed from the original meaning of respect given to other people. It points at the relationship between person-to-person, society and individuals and between societies. Schlanger's (2000) holistic framework of three meanings of respect served as the foundation for understanding and implementing dialogic connections in our work with groups. The framework suggests three types of dignity: 1. Honor-based respect emphasizes external elements such as proper etiquette, good manners or acknowledging someone's seniority of status, role, or

authority, such as a judge or king. 2. Accomplishment-based respect as a way of appreciating the other's achievements, as in the case of an outstanding artist or distinguished scientist; and 3. Dignity-based respect focuses on relating to others as equal and whole human beings. While the emphasis in the first two meanings is on respecting others for being superior, centering on external aspects, the latter meaning is based on sameness as human beings and the focus is on internal genuine relations. Dignity-based respect proposes non-contingent relationships. They are non-hierarchical and unconditioned by external factors such as status, actions or accomplishments. The other is fully accepted as a whole person regardless of his or her achievements, opposing opinions and internal contradictions. Similarly, presenting a narrative approach to mediation, Winslade and Monk (2000, p.132) advocate the type of respect in which conscious effort is made "not to see people as essentially anything, to refuse to sum people up. It implies a willingness to look for contradictions and to celebrate them as indicative of the range of possibilities that anyone has at their disposal. The value of this stance for mediation is that it helps mediators avoid getting trapped by the terms in which a dispute has people talking about each other."

All dialogue theorists pay great attention to the mode in which people communicate—the way meaning is created and ways to improve it. Dialogic communication is viewed here as a particular and desired quality of communication. Drawing on the Buberian approach to relations, the adjective *dialogic* is used rather than the noun *dialogue* to describe the way people communicate as a state of being--a dialogic stand toward the other instead of doing or conducting dialogue. Dialogic communication, in contrast to traditional views of communication that center at the transmission of messages or meanings as their major function, is a mutual process of inquiry, in which the self and relation are not fixed but are continually unfolding, enabling new ideas to conjointly created. The focus is on *how* communication is being constructed rather than on *what* is being transmitted. Communication is between subjects, *equal* persons or *Thous in Buberian* terms, who feel secure to express their multiple voices and diverse selves through ongoing evolving interaction. Such connection is indispensable for generating constant growth and transformation.

As a consultant, leading transformational processes[1] and facilitating inter-group dialogue[2], my work began with assisting participants in clarifying where others meet them internally. Engaging in processes I termed *PsyComm* (psychological & communicative), they investigated the encounter between others and their own multidimensional internal selves. Others point at people's multiple internal voices—their accepted *identity,* presented externally as well as the rejected *identity* they avoid or conceal. Participants started by increasing awareness to their both desired positive sides and, most significantly, their negative sides. Becoming more acquainted with the latter, the identity they try to hide, not only from others but also from themselves, was reported as a transformative experience. Understanding the relational dynamics and the inclination to like those who represent their positive identity, and on the contrary, to automatically reject people who remind them of their suppressed identity was very helpful in understanding repetitive defensive patterns.

The encounter with others we automatically reject poses a unique opportunity for expanding our selves as a whole. Recognizing and accepting concealed dimensions of the self enhances one's connection with them and reduces the proclivity of projecting them on others and blaming them for our her own issues, which contaminates the relationships. Increased awareness to these hidden dimensions emancipates us from being conditioned by others. We gain a sense of agency and control, internally and externally, and consequently can take responsibility, make better choices and develop healthier connections. Exploring PsyComm processes in the meeting between self and others, enabled people to shift energy from hiding and avoiding unwanted behaviors, to I-Thou or subject-subject relations. Recognizing the other as a whole subject, equal to oneself is a basic condition for communicating dialogically. Failing to do that, results in manipulative and poisonous short-lived relations, which prevent learning and human progress.

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[1] Establishing democratic schools as well as incorporating democratic values and organizational systems in public schools.
[2] Work with identity groups such as Israelis and Palestinians, Jews and Arabs and secular and religious groups.

This condition invites us to become more mindful of the mode we relate to others that typically remains unknown. I suggest dialogical modes of relating for ensuring sustainable relations. Treated disrespectfully or instrumentally, people are likely to reject others, become defensive, and cling to preexisting notions of their positive self. These reactions unavoidably result in adversarial interactions that inhibit learning and growth. Since, constructive mode of communication supports constant learning through cooperation, leaders and practitioners need to be mindful of them and incorporate congruent organizational activities, systems and structures that reinforce positive interactions. The relational mode is key condition for those who aspire to foster constant meaning making conjointly. Constructive mode of relating is particularly significant for creating novel meanings that arise from productive interactions between different stakeholders. To deepen our understanding of the possibility of transforming adversarial relations to long lasting ones, I examine the next interrelated condition—conflict, described earlier as the most complex and challenging human interaction that must be attended.

2. **Approaching Conflict -** Barriers to Positive Conflict Engagement

This condition extends an invitation to re-examine our approach toward conflict and our typical reactions when confronting it. It is suggested that our initial response and decisions in the complex, fast-paced and dynamic circumstances of conflict are dominated by automatic intuitive reactions (Peleg-Baker, 2012; a; b; c; 2014; 2014a; Peleg-Baker, et. al., 2012). Thus, engaging in benefiting from conflict and achieve transformation rely on the ability to improve the quality of our automatically triggered reaction and move the conflict to a constructive route. The ideas that inform this condition of positive engagement in conflict emanate from the concept presented earlier about dialogic communication. Working with executives and managers over the years, I noticed a typical negative orientation toward conflict. Although intellectual curiosity and understanding of the opportunity hidden in conflict was sometimes expressed, the habitual reaction when actually faced with the conflict was rejection. The second condition, therefore, should increase awareness to the way conflict is approached, our initial automatic reaction, and its implications, Awareness could better prepare us to engage in conflict and use it as a launching pad for positive change, learning and growth.

Conflict is nourished by diversity and constant change, and as such, it is inevitable, a natural process and an inseparable part of living. The conflictual situation is a most complicated and challenging human interaction and daily reality is rife with it. Our typical reaction to conflict might destabilize routine and hamper relationships. Different perspectives are often perceived as ominous and threatening. As a result, conflict frequently becomes a source of stress, aggravation and frustration rather than the opportunity for learning, development and transformation it potentially bears. An encounter with conflict carries intense, often negative emotions, which fuel and poison relationships. Consequently, a common automatic reaction is to resist conflict and turn defensive.

Whether conflict is afflicting or productive depends on how it is approached. Seen as a burden or threat, the tendency is to ignore or avoid conflict. This reaction might be counter-productive because conflicts are natural part of life and rooted in deep needs. If ignored, conflicts might persist and simmer until they ultimately erupt. The more they are denied, the stronger their potential to impede collaboration and ruin relations. Conversely, if viewed as an opportunity, conflict can elicit curiosity-based openness, which enables transformation and enriched relationships. Disagreement is interpreted and applied differently according to how conflict is perceived. It can be either a noisy argument to avoid or a vital interaction important for learning and generating meaningful relations.

Clinging to preexisting notions and reacting defensively is a typical biased response to incompatibilities (Cohen et. al., 2000). One possible reason this behavior is so prevalent is because people try to protect their identity and their sense of who they are by firmly upholding their established ideas and beliefs. Values, beliefs and attitudes are the building blocks of identity. Relinquishing parts of one's worldview might be perceived as compromising one's identity and sense of self. Thus, to maintain it people fiercely hold to their beliefs and

turn defensive. Another cause for rejection is the need to seek and preserve cognitive consistency, therefore, trying to reduce dissonance in beliefs, attitudes, and actions (Festinger, 1957). Another aspect for trying to maintain consistency is the propensity to create alliances and establish *common ground*. However, if conflict is understood as an opportunity for development and growth, the need for unity and solidarity is diminished while the possibility of utilizing variance for creating novel ideas and collaboratively practice them, increases.

Such psychological obstacles reflect cognitive and motivational dynamic processes that greatly affect how people process information and engage with others when differences emerge. These dispositions and biases act as stumbling blocks for constructively engaging with differences and hinder people's ability to mutually benefit from their differences. Communicating dialogically while experiencing complex the tense psychological and negative emotions involved in conflicts poses a unique challenge, and openness to differences is greatly hampered. Furthermore, perceiving conflict as negative thwarts other interests and motivations, such as contributing to and sustaining others' well-being, as studies on the connection between adults' attachments styles and pro-social behavior demonstrate (Mikulincer, & Shaver, 2003; 2007). When feeling threatened and anxious, individuals feel vulnerable and concentrate on their own distress. This self-oriented tendency hurts the ability to feel empathy towards others, and ultimately weakens social collaboration. Though I focus here on people's biased view and automatic rejection to differences and conflicts, it is noteworthy to mention that there are other significant psychological biases that act as obstacles to cooperative relations and constructive conflict engagement[3], but they exceed the scope of this paper.

In the same vein of approaching conflict negatively, many conflict resolution scholars and peacemaking scholars analyze conflict as a problem to solve or an undesired issue to resolve. Clear distinction between constructive and destructive conflict is rarely made. This is not to underestimate the important use of a *resolution* perspective for dealing with conflicts but merely to add to it. Similar to Lederach's (2003) conflict transformation lens, I suggest a complementary way of approaching conflict in the search for improved clarity and quality of human relationships. Viewing conflict as a problem or an issue to be solved focuses more on *content*—the impending issues that separate the parties, while the perspective advanced here puts more emphasis on the *process*--how conflict is viewed, reacted to and the meaning of conflict in the context of our long-term relationships. Problem orientation helps to effectively examine and solve the issues at stake while viewing conflict as an opportunity takes a long term and deeper perspective to conflict within the context of relationships. The goal is to foster substantial constructive relational change nurtured by diversity at a deeper level through understanding relational and communicational patterns involved in conflict.

To gain from conflict it is essential to envision the hidden prospect to reevaluate relations, keep them evolving and initiate positive change. It is a precious opportunity to enrich our life experience and deepen the understanding of ourselves, others and our relationships. To realize the opportunity and build new things out of differences requires major change in our present ways of relating. There are two dimensions for overcoming automatic biases and fostering beneficial engagement in conflict: 1.To be able to imagine conflict's potential value for healthy sustainable relationships, and 2. Continuous efforts to practice diverse ways to engage and realize the opportunities hidden in differences.

Finally, proper structural social spaces are necessary for reducing adversarial interactions and encouraging the use of conflict for human development. Organizations and institutions can be designed to ensure that people's basic human needs are met, and to sustain their secure feeling of their identity. It requires organizations to focus more on establishing platforms, practices and processes that support positive engagement of multiple stakeholders in conflicts. Self-assured individuals would invest less in protecting their

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[3] E.g., overconfidence in one's own assessments--failure to give assessments by one's peers as much weight as one's own; divergent construal—the interpretation of the same information differently by different people; going beyond provided information-assimilating information through filling in details of content and context; attribution bias—systematic flaws when people evaluate reasons for their own versus other's behaviors; and reactive devaluation—the act of offering a proposal reduces its value in the eyes of the receiver (see Ross & Ward, 1995; Tversky & Kahneman, 1974; Ross et. al., 2010).

own identity, and more in heeding others to genuinely and constructively deal with differences. The dialogic quality of such spaces significantly impacts how people approach others and handle divergences. Cultivating responsive environments complement the a positive conflict conflict approach. Together, they promote continuous evolvement based on multiple voices and ongoing responsiveness to human needs. This leads to the next fundamental condition--human needs.

3. **Addressing Human Needs-** The Deeper Human Dimension

The third condition highlights human needs—the underlying patterns of relations and motivators of conflicts. Basic human needs are universal, signifying our shared humanity (e.g., Maslow, 1943; Sites, 1973; Burton, 1984/ 1996; Max-Neef et. al., 1989). They are indispensable as indicators of human behavior and an ontological component of the human development process and relationships. Therefore, the aspect of human needs is a critical condition for building sustainable relationships and transform adversarial communication to cooperative. A need is a psychological motivator for acting toward a goal. It guides human behavior, thus, to understand a person's behavior and perceptions, it is crucial to know a person's goals, (Lewin, 1951). Tension arises when goals are unsatisfied. As Zeigarnik (1927) demonstrated almost a century ago, people remember uncompleted or interrupted tasks better than completed ones. People experience intrusive thoughts and dissonance when their goals are unaccomplished, and it keeps them pre-occupied and unavailable to others. Similar to these dynamics, when people are troubled by unfulfilled needs, they are unlikely to be available to attend others' needs and constructively engage with their disparities. No understanding of relationships and confictual situations is complete without considering human needs and how they are manifested in interactions with others and whether and how they are assimilated within the social spaces we create.

If addressing fundamental human needs had to be united into one concept, it would have been dignity-based respect, in which people relate to one another on an equal basis and as whole human-beings. When basic needs for recognition, appreciation, belonging and meaning, are met, people feel respected. They feel good about themselves, and are more likely to reach out, engage and support others. As a consultant, my colleagues and I gave special attention to these four basic needs in all processes and organizational structures we led. The pursuit of fulfilling these four ingredients had been a solid foundation for securing a sense of identity and for eliciting active engagement. As a result, defensive behavior when facing differences was considerably lessened, and social interaction was augmented. Buber's I-Thou relationships or Wilberg's core relatedness rely on people's secured feeling and satisfied needs.

Failure to address basic needs leaves people preoccupied, unsatisfied, and less secure, and consequently relations are likely to go awry. There is interdependency between needs and relations: as the quality of human relations rely on satisfying their needs, the latter depends on the quality of relationships, particularly earlier ones. Studying kids whose physical needs were met but not their social and emotional needs unrecognized and unfulfilled in early childhood, psychiatrists Spitz (1945), Bowlby (1953), among others, demonstrated the devastating implications on the kids' development and well-being, including violent behavior, depression and suicide. Burton (1984; 1996) proposes the environment as a key player in whether and how basic needs are fulfilled and influence behavior, including violence and aggression. The prevalent view of conflict carries an implicit assumption that man is aggressive and that it is attributed primarily to the quest of material gain (Burton, 1996 p. 7). Experience and theory, however, point out that material reasons are rarely a primary source of conflict. An alternative explanation is unfulfilled non-material and intangible omissions. Identity, cultural and ethnic issues are at the heart of many international disputes; labor struggles revolve around relationships between workers and management rather than merely salaries, and marital conflicts are frequently about non-material issues, such as recognition and appreciation. Numerous studies (Gibbons, 2006) have indicated that a few nonfinancial motivators are more effective than extra cash in building long-term employee engagement.

McKinsey Quarterly survey[4] presented that approval from immediate managers, leadership attention, and a chance to lead projects are more effective motivators than the highest-rated financial incentives. These findings confirm the centrality of needs for recognition, appreciation, belonging and meaning, and provide leaders with a great opportunity to reassess and focus more on the human dimension. It is especially relevant in times of economic crisis, which require to reduce costs and to balance short and long-term performance goals.

Burton (1996) viewpoint on the prevalence of adversarial approach and human aggressiveness is structural rather than individual-centered. It is the systemic and institutional conditions rather than aggressive human attributes that are culpable of aggression violent conflict. He argues that depriving basic needs such as recognition, participation and security results in violent conflict. Burton (1996) claims that it is likely that adversarial systems have evolved despite a strong human inclination for cooperative social relationships. Taking the individual-centered perspective, consultants also focus on individuals' adjustment to social context and expectations while institutions remain rigid and often oblivious of human needs.

Still, overlooking the human dimension does not mean it does not exist. Unfulfilled human needs are a constant source of adversarial communication, destructive conflicts, aggression and violence. There is an urgent task to recognize the failure to sufficiently attend the root cause of conflicts. Once awareness is achieved, the goal is to shift the focus from blaming people for maladjustment to fostering structures that are dynamically and flexibly responsive to human needs and maximize people participation in decision-making. Unless people are empowered in process of building their identity and role within social environments, they are likely to become a source of social disturbances and destabilization. The implication of such shift in direction is to assess and adjust organizational existing roles, structures, and practices and the way they address human needs. Similar to Max-Neef and colleagues (1989) taxonomy of human needs in which societies or communities can identify their level of wealth or poverty according to how their fundamental human needs are satisfied, organizations can identify and improve behaviors and practices based on whether they successfully address or not people's needs.

Recognition

Recognition is fundamental for building genuine healthy and long-term connections. As social creatures people are preoccupied with what others think of them, and it is critical for all human beings to have a positive view of self. Gergen et. al. (2004) view the affirmation of the other person's *utterance* or *act* as the decisive determinant of conjointly creating meaning. Comparably, yet distinctively, I refer not to merely the utterance but to the recognition or legitimation of the other as a primary building block for genuine constructive relations. Being accepted or recognized denotes I-Thou relations: being invited to participate, to develop meaning together and to belong. Ignoring the other puts the other's identity in doubt, leaving him or her preoccupied, anxious and unavailable. To overcome the tendency to protect identity and react defensively, particularly in situations of differences and conflicts, it is critical to validate a person's uniqueness regardless of beliefs, attitudes or deeds. Conversely, to undermine others' identity, results in relational distance and unavailability for connection. Recognition can be carried in many ways such as welcoming a person who enters a room, active and genuine listening, citing and considering one's opinion, inviting the person to a conversation, and give others responsibility. These relational behaviors make people feel valuable and are likely to result in cooperation and mutual growth. Recognizing does not necessarily mean agreeing with others. Nor is it merely being polite or nice, which is an external state. Rather, it is a genuine inner recognition and acceptance of otherness.

To conclude, attended human basic needs leads to a feeling of respect and acceptance. Still, even if one of the fundamental needs is left unfulfilled, people are in some way emotionally handicapped. Drawing on

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[4] McKinsey Quarterly survey- based on responses from 1,047 executives, managers, and employees around the world that was conducted in June 2009. More than a quarter of the respondents were corporate directors or CEOs or other C-level executives. The sample represents all regions and most sectors.

Bowlby's *Safe Heaven* (1969;1982), and Winnicott's *Holding Environment* (1965), supportive environments that ensure basic needs are critical for instituting a sense of security and trust. When people feel safe, socially, emotionally and physically, they are less threatened, experience positive emotions and have a lesser need to be on guard for their self and social identity. Being less defensive, they can avail themselves to be positively and socially engaged. Therefore, in today's fast-paced complex social environment, leadership's major goal is to systemically promote innovative safe spaces in which new ways of connecting and generating meanings are being formed.

Conclusion

Rooted in diverse disciplines, I call the attention to three distinct, yet interrelated conditions: a dialogic mode of relating, positive approach to conflict and addressing human needs. Jointly they offer an initial theoretical framework to help us to become more mindful of the fundamental conditions for sustainable relationships in which conflicts are transformed to opportunities. How mindful we are to each condition serves as an accelerator or inhibitor to the sustainability of relationships: whether meaning is more or less effectively coordinated, communication is more or less constructive, and connection is fragmented or coherent. The framework can be utilized to become more aware of relational processes and prepare for, manage and reflect on negotiations, difficult conversations and any human interaction. Being mindful of each condition will help stimulate positive emotions and establish healthy relations to avoid sour poisonous relations. The conditions also carry practical implications for leaders and practitioners. Institutions and organizations are encouraged to reassess their approach to the mode of relating, their attitude to conflict and whether or not human needs are addressed in organizational activities and systems. Learning is a relational process rather than an isolated one, and the emotions involved in relations could either promote or inhibit learning. To ensure people secure feelings and positive emotions, a substantial shift is needed from focusing on individual traits to paying extra attention to relationships and social contexts. Positive emotions and constructive engagement in conflicts could be encouraged through congruent organizational systems and processes that are embedded in everyday life. The role of leaders in promoting such changes is invaluable. They should ensure that institutions and organizations meet basic human needs in all practices and processes, and provide people access to resources and decision-making. Additionally, innovative organizational models for analysis, decision-making and strategic change that engage multiple stakeholders, such as consensus building, dialogic methods, appreciative inquiry, mentoring and coaching, collaborative projects and participative processes, organizational conflict management systems, and mediation, should be systemically implemented for encouraging collaborative contexts conducive for constant individual and organizational growth. Relationships become optimistic and hopeful when employing methods such as appreciative inquiry in which attention is given to positive experiences and strengths through inquiring about topics and questions rather than focusing on problem solving (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987; Jordan & Thatchenkery, 2011).

Creating sustainable organizational realities in which emotional and social-psychological dimensions are considered and incorporated structurally is a major challenge for leaderships in today's complex, fast changing environment. Leadership should integrate short-term response with long-term change. Hopefully this actionable and systematic model of condition
s will supply leaders and practitioners with guidelines for constructing more vital relational realities that foster the transformation of negative emotions to positive ones, conflicts to opportunities, and adversary to constructive communication. Conflict resolution approaches typically aim at solving problems and constructing agreements. They don't grant sufficient attention to sustainable outcomes. The goal of this paper is to promote ongoing positive engagement in differences and conflicts. The emphasis is on dealing with differences in the pre-destructive rather than the post-conflict phase. In other words, the major goal is to form healthy relationships that benefit from differences rather than dealing with the destructive consequences of an escalated conflict gone astray.

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